

DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION IN THE
WESLEYAN SPIRIT: GETTING THE
CLASS BACK TOGETHER

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ABSTRACT

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This project used qualitative action research to examine participants' experiences in a leadership development course at Greensboro First United Methodist Church (GFUMC) of Greensboro, Georgia. It sought to train Christian leaders in the biblical, historical, and theological foundations of the Wesleyan/Methodist movement, while connecting insights from Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Peter Bellini's "Truth Therapy" with discipleship formation using the Methodist class and band meetings format. The work of this project helped GFUMC develop a discipleship formation program using the structure of class and band meetings to help additional participants grow in their faith and support each other in love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give thanks to God for the opportunity to study at United Theological Seminary. This process has stretched my faith, expanded my knowledge, and strengthened my leadership skills. This was not a journey that I completed on my own. There are many people who supported and encouraged me during this season.

First, I express my gratitude to my cohort mentors, J. Elvin Sadler, DMin and Willie Marshall, DMin. You challenged me to do my best work. You provided wisdom, guidance, and great patience in spite of my stubbornness. I am also grateful for my peer associate Alexia Ellis. We made it!

Second, I express my gratitude to my professional associates. Troy Holloway, DMin, Gary Strack, DHA, Thomas Bantly, MD, and Michael Maslayak, EdD were generous in their support and encouragement. My professional associates asked challenging questions that helped me do my best work. I also extended a word of thanks to my editors Rychie Breidenstein, Ph.D. and June Johnston for helping me complete this endeavor in academic writing.

Third, I thank the people and leadership of Greensboro First United Methodist Church for their prayers, love, and support during this adventure. May this project be a blessing to your ministry of making disciples of Jesus Christ and transforming the world!

Lastly, I thank my family and friends for bearing with me during these three years of study. You all have always been supportive as I've worked to become a better disciple of Jesus Christ.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to all who labor in helping the church hold fast to the doctrine, spirit, and discipline of the Methodist movement.

INTRODUCTION

Five years ago, I was appointed as the associate pastor at Greensboro First United Methodist Church in Greensboro, Georgia. During my time at Greensboro First, I discerned the need for an intentional and organized discipleship ministry. This need arises, at least in part from the fact that the church has two campuses which have made it difficult to have an intentional and organized discipleship ministry that transcends campus location. The lack of a systematic discipleship program is hindering the church from following the stated mission of the United Methodist Church, “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,”¹ in order to make mature disciples of Jesus Christ and form leaders who are disciple makers. The foundation of this Doctor of Ministry project is the belief that a systematic discipleship program modeled after classes and bands in the early Methodist movement will help the church develop leaders who are empowered to make disciples of Jesus Christ. A secondary foundation of this project is that a systematic discipleship program will help participants keep focused on following Christ during times of change and uncertainty.

Chapter one will provide an overview of the ministry context at Greensboro First United Methodist Church. Important historic and demographic information that shaped the formation of the project will be presented. Much of this information comes from

¹ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2016: 93, Section 1, ¶120 (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016).

research materials made available through the North Georgia Annual Conference, such as Mission Insite. The history of the second campus and changes in the community also provide insight into the current ministry context. Chapter one concludes with information from my spiritual biography that connects my strengths and concerns with the need for discipleship small groups in times of change and uncertainty.

Chapter two will present the biblical foundations of this project, John 14:6-7. In this passage, Jesus declares that he is “The way, truth, and the life.” This passage, then, supports a claim that the church, as the body of Christ, should be a community that follows the way of Christ, knows and teaches the truth of Christ, and helps people experience the life of Christ.

Chapter three will present the project’s historical foundations. The historical foundations also affirm the importance of spiritual leaders having faith in Christ. The historical foundations will analyze John Wesley’s “Thoughts Upon Methodism.” In this document Wesley reveals three important best practices that can impact the work of spiritual transformation at Greensboro First.

Chapter four will present the theological foundations of this project. The spiritual growth of disciples connects with the theological foundations of this project. Wesleyan theology is grounded in grace. Grace is needed in every church, community, and life. A discipleship program at Greensboro First also needs to be grounded in grace.

Chapter five will examine the interdisciplinary foundations of this project. The interdisciplinary foundations examined the connection between spiritual formation and the psychological therapy known as Cognitive Behavior Therapy. Spiritual formation usually focuses on the heart, but Jesus wants to transform both our hearts and minds.

Psychology studies the way the mind impacts emotions and behavior. In his work, Dr. Peter Bellini ties what he calls “Truth Therapy” together with Cognitive Behavior Therapy and spiritual formation. Truth Therapy is about helping people know and apply the truth of Christ in their daily living.

Chapter six will review the formation, implementation, and findings of the research project. The main focus of the project was to analyze participants’ experiences in a four-session leadership training module that presented key insights from the project’s biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations. Chapter six presents the qualitative research method and design that was used to examine participants’ experiences in the class. The results of evaluative tools are presented with appropriate analysis of the data. Chapter six concludes with suggestions for improvement for the project and possibilities for further implementation of the findings

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

Greensboro First United Methodist Church's mission statement is, "One church. Two campuses. Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Eight years have passed since the church completed its second campus, and it continues trying to figure out how to do multisite ministry well. Though the church's decision to transition into two-campus ministry was well planned and approved by a vast majority of its members, it has caused unexpected consequences and a host of challenges that continue to impede and complicate church's ministry. The church's clergy and staff deal with these challenges on an ongoing basis.

Greensboro First United Methodist Church's greatest asset, weakness, and growing edge are its two campuses. The church has ample space for ministry, two distinct and strategic locations in the community, and opportunities for a wide variety of ministry programs. However, the financial debt incurred by the construction of the second campus placed financial burdens on the church's ministry budget. The second campus divided the critical mass of the congregation into two different and unequal groups. The second campus added a layer of complexity to the administrative and decision-making process. The second campus is also a continual source of stress and frustration for the

administrative and ministry staff. At times, a decision that could be quickly made in a church with one location is complicated and encumbered by the two campus dynamics.

This synergy paper will offer a brief overview of important historical and demographic information related to the church's context. I will then describe the various ways my spiritual journey, ministry interests and skills relate to the needs of Greensboro First United Methodist Church. This paper will help determine how my gifts and graces, ministry skills, and vocational interests intersect and connect with the church and its current needs. I will conclude with a tentative theme statement and hypothesis that will become the foundation for my Doctor of Ministry project in the area of Leadership Development and Organization Dynamics for Kingdom Empowerment and Spiritual Transformation.

Context of Greensboro First United Methodist Church

Relevant Historical Information

Researching the history of the church and community revealed generational patterns and examples of segmentation and division. From its beginning, Greene County and Greensboro was a divided community that experienced significant change from outsiders who moved into the area. In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, English colonists and early-American pioneers uprooted and pushed the Creek Indians out tribal lands that had been their home for hundreds of years. Slavery in the American south created a racially divided community that has long continued even after the abolishment of the practice and desegregation in the twentieth century. The end of

slavery transformed the economy of the agrarian community. During the period of Reconstruction that followed the war, many freed slaves and poor whites found themselves in a new form of economic slavery laboring as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Under both situations, wealthy white property owners benefited financially from the labor and economic dependence of the freed slaves and poor whites who now worked for them. Greene County continues to have distinct classes of poor and rich, white and African American residents.

After the Civil War, Greene County continued to be an agricultural community. Cotton remained the primary crop. Year after year, farmland in the region produced a very profitable cotton harvest; however, sharecroppers and tenant farmers did not share in the profits of their labor and continued to suffer economic hardship. In 1917, the boll weevil destroyed the cotton crop which in turn ruined the local economy. Census data records that by 1930 Greene County had lost about one-third of its population.¹ The poor who were unable to leave the county and find employment elsewhere became even poorer. Greene County suffered through the Great Depression, but was able to experience slight economic improvement from the New Deal and the impact of World War Two. Large industrial mills in the community provided good paying jobs and stable employment for many blue-collar workers and their families.

The loss of population and the continued economic disparity between the landed rich, the working class, and the poor further segmented and divided the community. This pattern continued through World War Two and into the 1980s. The result was a

¹ US Bureau of the Census, "Georgia: Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990," compiled and ed. by Richard L. Forstall (Washington, DC: Population Division, US Bureau of the Census, 1995), accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ga190090.txt>.

population of deeply rooted, socially divided, Greene county native residents who love their community. During this time, the church congregation was mainly composed of long-term and generational Greene County residents.² A few of these native Greene County residents are still connected to the church, but currently the vast majority of church members have moved to the community from elsewhere.

In the 1970s Georgia Power dammed up the Oconee River basin and created Lake Oconee. Lake Oconee would become a catalyst for change. In the 1980s, real estate development began around the newly formed lake. In 1989, The Reynolds Development Corporation began the work of transforming a family hunting retreat and surrounding timberland into an upper-middle-class gated golf community named Reynolds Plantation.³ By the mid-1990s, there were six gated golf communities in development around the lake. These new neighborhoods became trendy options for retirement and vacation homes on the lake.

In the early 1990s, Greensboro First was struggling to maintain its station status.⁴ In 1997, the Annual Conference was considering placing Greensboro back on a charge with Walker United Methodist.⁵ The Walker church is located near the lake and the new neighborhood developments. In the 1990s the county's population started to increase again. Most the population growth came from new residents moving into the area, not

² Horace Harwell, interview by author, Greensboro, November 6, 2017.

³ Reynolds Lake Oconee, "Our Story," Reynolds Lake Oconee, accessed November 3, 2017, <https://www.reynoldslakeoconee.com/our-community/our-story>.

⁴ In the United Methodist Church, a station is a church that can financially support a pastoral appointment and does not share the appointed clergy with another congregation. A charge is a connection of two or more churches that share pastoral leadership.

⁵ Richard Chewning, interview by author, Greensboro, October 31, 2017.

from an increase in the native birth rate.⁶ The influx of new residents became another source of division in the community. New residents changed the social and cultural dynamics of the area and church. From 1970 to 2015, Greene County experienced the highest percentage of change in real per capita income in the state, a key indicator of the economic transformation taking place in the community.⁷ Long-term Greene County residents began to identify the newcomers as “Lake people,” while some of the more vocal new residents called the Greene County natives, “Cave people.”⁸

In 1997, Greensboro welcomed Richard Chewning as its new pastor. He served the church for fourteen years. Rev. Chewning spent a significant part of his ministry trying to build a unified community and congregation. He was intentional about pastoring both the church and community. He was very involved with civic organizations and the school system. At times he would voice his passion for a unified community from the pulpit. For example, in one sermon Rev. Chewning boldly proclaimed, “I’m tired of hearing about town people and lake people. We are all God’s people.” The congregation responded with a standing applause.⁹ This sentiment connected with a congregation and pastor who yearned to be part of a united church and community.

⁶ US Bureau of the Census, “Georgia.”

⁷ Georgia Regional Economic Analysis Project, “Real* Per Capita Personal Income Growth by Decade, Regions and Counties of Georgia, 1970 - 2015,” Pacific Northwest Regional Economic Analysis Project, accessed online November 3, 2017, https://georgia.reaproject.org/analysis/comparative-indicators/growth_by_decade/per_capita_personal_income/tools/.

⁸ Chewning, interview.

⁹ Chewning, interview.

When Rev. Chewning arrived in 1997, average worship attendance was 75; and when he left the church in 2011, average worship attendance was approaching 400.¹⁰ The significant increase in church membership and worship attendance forced the congregation into exploring options for expanding the church facilities. The Church Council formed a special task force that was entrusted with the work of determining the best course of action.

The task force determined a second campus would be the best option for the church at that time. Because of its landlocked location, there were no viable options to expand the historic sanctuary. The congregation did not want to leave downtown Greensboro.¹¹ They wanted to keep a presence in the heart of Greensboro. In 2007, the congregation voted to build a second campus. The first vote did not pass the 80% approval margin the task force wanted to move forward.¹² A few months later, the church met again to vote on the proposal. The second vote passed with more than 80% approval. The new campus would be located ten miles south of the historic campus in downtown Greensboro and near the lake. In November 2009 the church held its first worship service in the new sanctuary.

The Great Recession of 2008 had a significant impact on the community and the church. Housing development all but stopped. Home values dropped. The Great Recession hurt the economic stability of the church. The anticipated growth that was going to help finance the \$7 million building debt for the second campus did not

¹⁰ Chewning, interview.

¹¹ Chewning, interview.

¹² The vote was 79% yes and 21% no. According to Chewning, 27 people voted no. The second vote passed with 88% of the congregation voting yes.

materialize. By 2010, the building debt became unsustainable. Fortunately, the church was able to restructure its debt payments with the help of a new lender.

Soon after opening, the new campus became a source of discord. The new campus's debt placed a heavy financial burden on the church. Worship attendance at the North Campus dropped significantly as many of the members who lived near the lake began worshipping at the new campus. The initial plan was for ministry programs and activities to be duplicated and balanced between the two locations, but that plan was never fully realized. The narrative of the voting process to build the second campus changed as well. Many in the congregation forgot or did not know how close the first vote was. They only remembered that it failed, and they had a second vote. In the new narrative, their focus was on the need for a second vote was reframed as the Annual Conference forcing our hand to build the second campus.¹³

In 2011, the church also experienced a change in pastoral leadership. This change and various congregational conflicts created instability in the church. The new pastor struggled to unify the campuses. Some church members have suggested that he showed a preference to one campus over the other. Even today, there are church members who will not mention this pastor's name and do not like to discuss his tenure at the church. They call his tenure, "the hard years."

The church conflict impacted worship. People quit attending worship or left the church altogether. Average Sunday worship that had been around 400 dropped below 200. Congregational financial support dropped significantly. The Church Council cut

¹³ I was told that the District Superintendent took the second vote by asking everyone who was against the plan to stand. Only two people stood. He then said the vote passed.

ministry budgets to the bare bones, terminated staff positions, and ceased paying its conference apportionments. Church leaders grew very concerned about the church's health and sustainability. Many vital leaders demanded a change in pastoral leadership. They felt that the church was a house of cards that was able to tumble. These leaders asked the Bishop for a mid-year change in pastoral appointments. The Bishop agreed. The pastor was placed on leave, and for six months, a local retired elder served as the church's interim pastor. The interim pastor stopped the decline and worked hard to stabilize and prepare the congregation for their new pastor. The interim pastor lives in the area and is still well regarded by many of the leaders in the church.

Since 2012, the church and community have experienced economic recovery and an influx of new people moving into the area. The current pastor, Rev. Michael T. Morgan, is now leading the church in fulfilling its mission as a multi-site congregation. Rev. Morgan has brought a stabilizing presence to the congregation, but at times he finds the two campus dynamics challenging and frustrating. We often discuss these frustrations and how to address, manage, and possibly resolve them. When he first arrived at Greensboro First, one of the staff members asked, "Did the Bishop send you here to split these two churches apart or keep them together?"¹⁴

Rev. Morgan was the driving force behind the creation of the church's previous mission statement, "One church. Two Campuses. All on the same page." During his first year at the church, he encouraged and inspired the congregation to read the Bible together as a means to build unity. Hence the phrase, "All on the same page," became part of the mission statement he drafted.

¹⁴ Mike Morgan, interview by author, Greensboro, November 9, 2017.

Over the last three years, the church has experienced an increase in worship attendance, membership, and the financial position has improved; thus, allowing for ministry programs and staff to rebuild to pre-recession levels. The majority of new members are people who are also new to the community. One of the most pressing needs for the church is for it to be ready for the wave of growth, similar to the boom that took place in the early 2000's, that is likely coming to the area in the next five years.

Relevant Demographic Information

Current Census data estimates the population the church's community is 19,077.¹⁵ Census data also reports that from 2000 to 2010, the survey area experienced a 24.8% increase in population. Currently, the number of households in the area is growing faster than the population. This pattern of growth is expected in an area populated mostly by older adults. Most homes in the community are being occupied by couples with no children. However, it is also important to note that the number of families with children in the area is projected to increase. The success and growing reputation of Lake Oconee Academy, a prestigious public charter school, continues to draw more families with children into the county. MissionInsite, a demographic research company hired by our Annual Conference, projects that the population of the area will continue to grow by 4.5% over the next five years.¹⁶ The church needs to discover how to connect with these new residents. My undergraduate in marketing research will be a great asset in finding creative ways to reach out to these new residents.

¹⁵ MissionInsite, "The ExecutiveInsite Report: Greensboro First UMC" (Irvine, CA: MissionInsite, 2017), 2.

¹⁶ MissionInsite, "The ExecutiveInsite Report: Greensboro First UMC," 2.

Current Census data reveals that population in the area is predominately white (67%). African Americans (25%) comprise the second largest racial group in the population. Hispanics and Latinos are a growing ethnic group, but are still a small ethnic group (7%) in the survey area. Population projections from MissionInsite suggest that there will be little change in the racial and ethnic makeup of the community.¹⁷ The church does not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the community, for it is almost exclusively a white congregation. The lack of the diversity in the church is another example of the segmentation of the community. I hope the diversity of my doctoral focus group will help me learn how to best relate to and connect with the diversity in the church's community.

The average age of the church's community is perhaps one of the most interesting demographic markers for the community. In 2000, the average age of the study area was 39.8 years, which was just over five years older than the state average. In 2010, the average age of the area was 43.81 years, which was a 10.1% increase from the 2000 average. MissionInsite projects that the average age in the community will continue to increase from 2017 to 2027. The community's average age will likely remain older than the state average. The above average age of the community is expected in an area that promotes itself as a retirement community. In 2017, people age 55 and over make up almost 42% of the community.¹⁸ The average age of the church population is in line with the age of the community, for older adults make up the majority of the congregation. The church can continue to focus on ministry to older adults, but it also needs to be realistic

¹⁷ MissionInsite, "The ExecutiveInsite Report: Greensboro First UMC," 3.

¹⁸ MissionInsite, "The ExecutiveInsite Report: Greensboro First UMC," 4.

about its desire to offer a wide variety of programs to children, youth, young adults, and their families. Spending time with my grandparents as a child and teen helps me relate to the older members of the church. My young adult status helps me connect with this age group as well. My previous experience with youth and children ministry is an asset for working with this age group.

MissionInsite reports that the average household income for the area is slightly over \$82,000. The research group projects that the over the next five years average household income will increase by 13.6%.¹⁹ Per Capita income will continue to increase by similar levels.

The top five Mosiac segments in the study area are: Booming with Confidence-Golf Carts and Gourmets (25.4%), Pastoral Pride-Rural Southern Bliss (12.9%), Thriving Boomers-Unspoiled Splendor (8.3%), Blue Sky Boomers-Booming and Consuming (7.6%), Autumn Years-Rural Escape (6.8%).²⁰ These Mosaic segments share a common theme of wealth and consumption. The Mosaic groups are visibly present in the congregation as well. The majority of church members are upper-middle class, white, older adults. Many of the members retired from professional careers. Several retired corporate executives are actively involved with church leadership and ministry. My easy-going personality has helped me work with people who are wealthier than me. My educational level helps me connect with them professionally. Many of the wealthy members of the church are self-made and come from a social status and background

¹⁹ MissionInsite, "The ExecutiveInsite Report: Greensboro First UMC," 7.

²⁰ MissionInsite, "The ExecutiveInsite Report: Greensboro First UMC," 13.

similar to that of my family. The wealth of the congregation has not hindered my ministry. I simply remind them, “We are blessed to be a blessing.”

Like the church, the community is divided into two areas. The interstate is a clear dividing line in the county. The interstate divides the community economically, by population, and racially. Most of the growth in the community is south of the interstate and around the lake. Most of the wealthy people in the community live south of the interstate. Most of the minorities in the community live north of the interstate. This community is also divided. The interstate is a clear dividing line in the county. The interstate divides the community economically, by population, and racially. Most of the growth in the community is south of the interstate and around the lake. Most of the wealthy people in the community live south of the interstate. Most of the minorities in the community live north of the interstate. The public charter school is south of the interstate, while the poorly performing county schools are north of the interstate.

The church and its ministries are currently heavily oriented to the South campus area. Most of our ministries and meetings take place at our South campus. Most of our new members live near our South Campus and attend worship there. We are intentional about balancing our ministries between both campuses, but the church prefers to have special functions at the South Campus, because it has more space than North Campus. Throughout the year, we have combined worship services at each campus. On these Sundays, we intentionally worship as one church at one location. I have noticed that at the combined services very few people will attend the service if it is at the campus where they do not usually attend Sunday morning worship.

Ministry Journey

In 2015 the Bishop appointed me to serve Greensboro First as its associate pastor. My primary foci are spiritual formation and congregational care. I also spend a significant portion of my time in the office helping with administration. I preach once or twice a month, so I do not miss the pulpit. I have also been able to use my creative and marketing skills to develop and promote ministries in the local church and community. I am blessed to serve a congregation very similar to the church where I grew up as a teenager.

I feel comfortable at Greensboro. As a child and teenager, I attended large churches with program ministries that were similar to Greensboro First United Methodist Church. These churches were led by senior pastors who were assisted by a host of paid ministry leaders and supported by a team of church administrators and volunteers. The congregations' demographics were very similar as well. In each church, membership was primarily white, middle class, educated, professional, and politically and theologically conservative. There are several families at Greensboro First who have moved from my hometown and church. This shared relational background is a great asset to my ministry and has helped me quickly develop rapport in the two short years I have been at the church.

My first pastoral appointments were very different from the churches of my childhood and youth. My first congregation was a small rural United Methodist church in the middle of central Kentucky. We considered twenty people a large crowd for worship. This congregation met for worship on the second, fourth, and quarterly fifth Sunday of the month. On the first and third Sundays, the congregation would worship at a

neighboring Southern Baptist Church. In most homes, membership was blended between the two churches, with spouses being members of different churches. The relationship worked for the two small churches and dates back to the days before World War Two when the farms in the areas had large numbers of tenant farmers living on them.

Before coming to Greensboro, I served the Colbert-Comer Circuit in the Athens-Elberton District. I served the Colbert-Comer Charge for five wonderful years. Being the pastor of two churches was challenging. Trying to honor the identity and independence of each congregation while at the same time working to develop synergy through partnership and shared resources was a difficult and ongoing problem. However, those five years of experience have been a great resource for me at Greensboro. When I face a problem at Greensboro, I can look back at past experiences and utilize the lessons learned from them to address the present situation.

I want to utilize my gifts and graces to help the congregation make disciples of Jesus Christ and transform the world. This work starts in our hearts and moves out from our church into our changing and growing community. As stated earlier, the study of the church and community history and context has revealed patterns and attitudes of disunity. The two-campus ministry model of the church only adds complexity and magnifies the stresses on the church and congregation. I find this environment similar to that of my childhood before, during, and after my parents' divorce. Having parents who had trouble communicating with each other, who did not always agree on decisions that needed to be made, and would ultimately live in two separate homes, has given me a unique perspective to ministry in a church with two campuses.

Reviewing my ministry journey, I see where my life experiences have been a source of wisdom and helped me in my clergy work. I find comfort in knowing worship attendance, giving, general moral, and community engagement increased during my service to each church. I believe success in ministry comes from embracing shared ministry with the laity, helping the laity discover and use their gifts and graces, and trusting in God's grace to lead us in mission and ministry. I have learned not to focus on what is best for the church or congregation, but what is best for the Kingdom of God. What is best for the Kingdom of God is always best for the church.

At the 2017 Aldersgate Renewal Ministries Conference, Bishop Swanson prayed for me to experience the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit. I was slain in the Spirit. That night I was able to confess my failure to trust God fully and depend on God's grace to help me in my ministry. The Holy Spirit convicted me of holding onto my spirit of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency is another expression of division. No church can succeed for long if it prides itself on being self-sufficient. The church is the connected body of Christ. The church is larger than a congregation, building, or in the case of Greensboro First, a campus. I continue to stress over and over to people who do not like having two campuses, that Greensboro First needs each campus. The church as whole would be significantly weaker without both.

Synergy Development

In my three years as the church's associate pastor, I have sensed the church at times is more like two independent churches instead of one congregation with two locations. The spirit of division is eerily similar to the emotional feelings I experienced in

my home as a child and teenager. The church often reminds me of my family's dysfunction before and after my parents' divorce. I was one child who was expected to live my life in two different homes, all the while why not showing a preference to one home or parent over the other. As an associate pastor, I divide my time between two locations, two offices, and two worship services. I cannot show a preference to one campus, office, or worship service over the other. I have even been asked by church members if I have a preference for one church over the other.

These attitudes and feelings are not helpful in a congregation that is trying to have a unified mission. As Jesus said in Mark 3:25 (ESV), "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." Hopefully, this research project will offer insights and opportunities for the congregation to find reconciliation, experience healing, and become a unified body of believers.

As a child, I never understood divorce. To be honest, divorce still does not make sense to me. My sister had some friends whose parents were divorced. I did not understand how people who said they loved each other at their wedding could fall out of love. My parents would fight and fuss, but I thought that was what married people did. That was what I saw each night on television. In the end, I always trusted in the power of love to make things right and hold my family together.

When my parents divorced, I felt as if I lost part of my identity. I was asked to make decisions that no child should be asked to make. I had to decide with which parent I wanted to live. Sometimes I wonder if Greensboro First is inadvertently making the same request of our congregation. Are we forcing our church members to choose one campus

over the other? Or perhaps, is the congregation asking the pastors and staff to choose one campus over the other?

It is difficult to serve a church that has two campuses. The church is still trying to find an effective way to do sustainable ministry in a divided community. The 2019 called session of General Conference and the upcoming 2020 General Conference of the United Methodist Church has brought added stress to the local church. The General Conference of the United Methodist Church will be making important decisions about the future of the denomination. One possible decision would be a divorce of the denomination into different theological groups. If, so annual conferences, clergy, local churches, and church members will possibly have to make some type of decision about what denominational group they will become part of and connected with. By its nature church work is very emotional and demanding on staff, volunteers, ministers, and clergy. I wonder if our two campuses only magnify the inherent emotional strain on the church staff and congregation. I also wonder if the ongoing denominational discussions and upcoming decisions about the future of the church also create stress in the local church. Both sources of strain and stress appear to be similar to the way my parents' divorce intensified the emotional strain and stress in my life.

Despite my parents' divorce, I still believe love has the power to make things right and to hold us together. The biblical passage I John 4:8 teaches us that God is love. Love has the power to reconcile and restore. Ephesians 2:14-18 reminds us how God's love is at work through Christ was able to reconcile humanity to God and also with each other. God's grace is love at work. Perhaps developing covenant community groups in the pattern of the 18th and 19th century Methodist class and band meetings would help the

congregation at Greensboro First watch over each other and hold each other together in Christian love. Successfully developing a network of covenant community small group classes and bands in the church would require leaders to implement the program. The small group program could also help Greensboro First build a systematic discipleship program. Such a program could also help the church make disciples in a multi-site context. If Greensboro First United Methodist Church establishes a systematic discipleship formation program using classes and bands, it will help the congregation make disciples of Jesus Christ. Such a program could also help strengthen congregational unity.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In his timely book *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, Tod Bolsinger offers an insightful critique of the ministry needs, challenges, and opportunities that the Christian church faces today at, what is arguably, the end of Christendom. Bolsinger contends that the church needs to prepare for ministry in a post-Christian culture, even in the United States which has long provided a favorable environment for Christian ministry. According to Bolsinger, if the church wants to be faithful and fruitful in this new season of ministry, it must make a paradigm shift to a transformational leadership model.¹

For Bolsinger, transformational leadership lies at the intersection of what he calls “technical competence, relational congruence, and adaptive capacity.”² These components will be discussed in greater detail in other chapters of this research project, but it is helpful to have a working understanding of these terms early.

¹ Todd Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountain: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 11-16.

² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountain*, 43.

Technical competence, then, is a proven pattern of competence in basic management skills.³ Technical competence is developed from the study management and leadership theory. Technical competence comes from learning. Relational congruence is a proven pattern of emotional maturity and stability.⁴ Relational congruence is rooted in healthy self-awareness and self-disclosure. Relational congruence is developed by sharing life together with others. Bolsinger defines adaptive capacity as “[the ability] to lead a process of shifting values, habits, and behaviors in order to grow and discover solutions to the greatest challenges brought on by a changing world.”⁵ Christian discipleship formation in the Wesleyan tradition is an expression of transformational leadership.

Using Bolsinger’s model of transformative leadership, disciples develop technical competence through study of Christian teaching. Disciples can develop relational congruence by sharing life together in the community and accountability, such as a Methodist class or band meeting. If a disciple wants to grow in adaptive capacity, then they should know the truth of God. Being guided by the Spirit of Truth and knowing God’s truth help disciples grow in their adaptive capacity in a world of changing norms and values. Watching over each other in Christian love is an example of transformational leadership.

In the later part of the Gospel of John, one finds a biblical example of Bolsinger’s transformational leadership construct. Chapters fourteen to seventeen of the Gospel are

³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountain*, 44.

⁴ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountain*, 44.

⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountain*, 44.

known as “The Farewell Discourses” and mark a shift in the ministry focus of Jesus Christ. At the time Jesus makes these statements, his ministry transitions from one in which he is a miracle and sign worker to that of the Suffering Servant who willingly lays down his life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. The disciples of Jesus begin their transition from followers of the man to leaders of the movement begun by Jesus. He prepares his disciples for the task before them. They are heading into uncharted territory, but Jesus will not send them into the unknown unprepared or alone. In his Farewell Discourses, Jesus imparts wisdom and teaching that will guide the disciples on their way forward, but most importantly he gives them the promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is also forming a foundation of how disciples should watch over each other in love.

As they face new and uncharted territory following Jesus crucifixion and resurrection, the promise of the Holy Spirit will be fulfilled at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit will provide the ultimate example of transformation. The disciples will be empowered and transformed by the Holy Spirit into apostles. They will be endued with power from on high and sent on a journey into the wilderness of ‘uncharted territory’ of early Christianity with the life-changing good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is God’s loving power and presence with us. The Holy Spirit is how God watches over us in love.

Greensboro First United Methodist Church finds itself facing similar unknown and uncharted territory. The community continues to change demographically with new residents moving into the area. The congregation continues to evolve as new members join the church and members die, move away, join other congregations, or simply disengage from being active members. The church leadership and staff are changing as

well. Each year laity assume new leadership roles in the church. The church has recently hired several new staff members. The church, like so many other organizations, faces technological and adaptive change and challenges.

Greensboro First United Methodist Church has a critical need for transformative leadership. Because Greensboro First is a Christian ministry, it is vital that this transformational leadership be grounded in Christian values, teaching, and doctrine. Therefore, the exegetical study of John 14:5-7, with a survey of the surrounding passage of John 13:36-14:31, will provide a necessary foundation for biblical reflection and implementation of the research project in the area of leadership development and organization dynamics for Kingdom empowerment and spiritual transformation.

The first step of the study will note the important general historical features of the Gospel of John; including, authorship, date, and location of writing, original recipients, and purpose of the writing. Before examining the selected text, it will be helpful to sketch a general outline of the entire Gospel. After outlining the Gospel, the next step will be to survey and examine selected modern English translations of the John 14:5-7. After reviewing the modern English translations, it will be beneficial to study key words and phrases found in the passage. The exegetical study will then shift to a review of the internal and external grammatical, historical, and literary features of the text. The study will also examine the intertextuality of the passage. The insights from the exegetical study of John 14:5-7 will enable a proper conclusion that includes the application of the theology and message of the selected text.

General Historical Features of the Gospel of John

Even though the Fourth Gospel bears the name of John, modern biblical scholars do not agree upon the authorship of the book. In John 21:24, the unknown Beloved Disciple claims to be the one who wrote down the faithful testimonies that form the material of the book. Since the earliest days of the Gospel, researchers have tried to discover the identity of the Beloved Disciple. Second-century church father Irenaeus, argued that John, the son of Zebedee, was, in fact, the Beloved Disciple.⁶ Some scholars support this argument because the Gospel contains details of events that were clearly written by an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus.⁷ For example, in John 13:36-14:1 the author's details of the conversations between Jesus and the disciples come across as written by someone who heard the discourse in person.

However, many modern scholars, such as R.E. Brown and R. Schnackenberg, point to the lack of reliable internal evidence in the Gospel itself to support the traditional claim that John, son of Zebedee, authored the gospel.⁸ Modern scholarship offers additional possibilities for authorship of the Fourth Gospel including John the Elder, who is also the author of 2 and 3 John, as well as a collection of authors known as the Johannine Community.⁹ The Johannine Community was an early Christian community or

⁶ David S. Dockery, gen. ed., *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 606, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

⁷ Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook*, 606.

⁸ Urban C. von Wahlde, "John, Gospel of," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Bible Software 7.14.

⁹ Robert Kysar, "John, The Gospel of," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 919, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

church community that were students or disciples of the apostle John.¹⁰ Perhaps noted biblical scholar William Barclay offers the best solution to the question of authorship. Barclay writes: “The one who actually penned the letters was John the elder; the mind and memory behind them was the aged John the apostle, the master whom John the elder always described as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’”¹¹

Though authorship of the Gospel is questioned, scholars tend to agree upon the date and purpose of the writing. Tradition holds that the Gospel of John was written in the late first century. Early manuscripts of the Gospel which date back to the second century, support dating of the original text to the mid-90s CE.¹² Common themes, including problems with the Pharisees, in the Gospel suggest the author wrote in the region of Galilee, Palestine, or Syria.¹³ Church tradition holds that John penned this Gospel while serving the church in Ephesus.¹⁴ Though there is a slight difference in opinion about where the Gospel was written, it is clear that the Gospel was written outside of Jerusalem.

The theological themes in the Gospel and outside references from the days of the early Church, strongly suggest that John wrote his account of the life of Christ to address false teaching that had taken root in the early church. In his treatise *Against Heresies*,

¹⁰ Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 352, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

¹¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, rev. and updated, vol. 1, *The New Daily Study Bible* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), 27, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

¹² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), John, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

¹³ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*.

¹⁴ Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 1–10*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), xxv, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

Irenaeus, not only affirms John, son of Zebedee, as the gospel's author, but strongly argues John wrote the Gospel to address Gnostic teachers who had misappropriated the teachings of Christ.¹⁵ Gnosticism was an early Christian heresy which focused on a metaphysical dualism between good and evil. Themes of light and dark were common characteristics of Gnostic teaching

With the intended purpose of the Gospel of John in mind, it is likely its author wrote this book for first century Christians who needed clarification and instruction about the teachings of Jesus Christ. V. George Shillington notes, "[T]he Gospel of John, especially in the Farewell Discourses, aims at keeping the [Johannine] community connected with [the] Jesus of history through the power of the Spirit-Paraclete."¹⁶

Over time the Gospel of John has become an excellent resource for evangelism and teaching the faith to new converts. It is very common for converts at evangelical crusades to receive a copy of the Gospel of John as a helpful means to introduce them to the Christian faith. This contemporary usage of the Fourth Gospel is fitting and honors the likely original intent of the book, for through the text, Jesus Christ, the incarnate living word of God, is presented to the reader. In reading this Gospel, one comes to know the same Jesus Christ whom the author of the Gospel personally knew and faithfully followed as, "The way, the truth, and the life."

¹⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, "Irenaeus Against Heresies," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 426, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

¹⁶ V. George Shillington, "The Spirit-Paraclete as Jesus' Alter Ego in the Fourth Gospel (John 14-16)," *Vision* 13, no 1 (Spr 2012): 34, accessed April 12, 2018, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

General Outline of the Gospel

The Gospel of John offers a perspective on the life of Jesus Christ that is significantly different from the perspectives offered by the synoptic gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke generally follow a linear, historic, and biographic approach of retelling the events associated with the life and ministry of Christ. According to John 20:31, the Fourth Gospel was written so, “That you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.” Thus, the Gospel of John was written so that Jesus’s miracles, teaching, and passages of self-disclosure, such as the “I am” statement of John 14:6, present him in such a way that those who read or heard the Gospel would believe and place their faith in Christ.

The following outline shows the structure and flow of the author’s argument in the Gospel.

- I. Prologue, 1:1-18
- II. The first Witnesses of Christ, 1:19-51
- III. The Sign Acts and Miracles 2:1-12:50
- IV. The Upper Room and Farewell Discourse, 13:1-16:33
- V. Jesus’s Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, 17:1-26
- VI. Arrest and Trial, 18:1-19:16
- VII. Crucifixion and Burial, 19:17-42
- VIII. Resurrection and Appearances, 20:1-21:25

John’s Gospel does not begin with the traditional genealogies and birth narratives as do the Synoptic Gospels, but with a poetic theological treatise about the divine nature of Christ as the incarnate and the living Word (*logos*) of God. For the Stoic philosophers of the New Testament time, *logos* described the principle of divine reason which caused

the natural creation to grow.¹⁷ The rest of the Gospel will show the *logos* in action through the ministry and miracles of Jesus. The miracle stories are usually followed by narrative teaching in which Jesus discloses wisdom about himself and the kingdom of God. For example, after turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Jesus travels to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and drives out money changers from the Temple courts. Jesus then proceeds to give an allusion to his death and resurrection that will occur later in the Gospel when Jesus returns to Jerusalem celebrate another Passover with his disciples in the Upper Room.¹⁸

As the Gospel progresses, the miracles also grow in significance and grandeur. The first sign is the miracle of turning water into wine at the Wedding in Cana.¹⁹ The penultimate sign is the raising of Lazarus from the dead.²⁰ Lazarus's resurrection marks a transition in the Gospel's plot, for the religious authorities now make plans to kill Jesus.²¹ The focus of the Gospel changes, for what had been a very public ministry to crowds and followers now becomes intimate and personal in the safety and security of the Upper Room. John 13-17 likely occurs in the Upper Room where Jesus and his disciples are gathered to observe the Passover.

The final hours of Jesus life and ministry are recorded in John 13-17. Jesus uses this moment to model the faithfulness and fruitfulness of the *logos*. This teaching is not

¹⁷ Donald Guthrie, "John," *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1025.

¹⁸ John 2:13-25.

¹⁹ John 2:1-12.

²⁰ John 11:1-46.

²¹ John 11:47-53.

instruction for the crowds, but it is for Jesus's closest followers and friends, the twelve disciples. In his Farewell Discourses, Jesus braces the disciples for the unknown and uncertainty they will experience when Jesus is betrayed, arrested, and crucified.²² At the brink of a journey into the wilderness of uncharted territory is the context in which the teaching of John 14:5-7 takes place.

Greek and English Translation

With a general understanding of the historical background and outline of the Gospel established, it is appropriate to develop a translation of John 14:5-7 before engaging in the more detailed study of the selected pericope.

John 14:5-7 in *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* reads:

λέγει αὐτῷ Θωμᾶς· Κύριε, οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ὑπάγεις· πῶς δυνάμεθα τὴν ὁδὸν εἰδέναι; λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ· οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εἰ μὴ δι' ἐμοῦ. εἰ ἐγνώκειτέ με, καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου ἂν ᾔδειτε· ἀπ' ἃρτι γινώσκετε αὐτὸν καὶ ἑώρακατε αὐτόν.²³

The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament: SBL Edition offers the following literal translation of John 14:5-7:

Said to him Thomas, “Lord not know where you are going. How are we able the way to know? Said to him Jesus, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me also, Father my, you would have known. From now you know him and have seen him.”²⁴

²² J. Carl Laney, “The Vine, the Branches, and What It Means to Abide,” in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel and Kristopher A. Lyle (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Jn 15:1–11, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

²³ Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011–2013), Jn 14:5–7, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

²⁴ Albert L. Lukaszewski, Mark Dubis, and J. Ted Blakley, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011), Jn 14:5, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

Among the modern English translations, there are minimal differences in the way the original Greek text is translated.²⁵ The differences that do exist appear to be slight editorial changes that help the text fit the flow and readability of the translation as a whole. However, verse 7 has significant translation differences among some of the modern translations. In his commentary on this passage, Francis J. Moloney notes the translations based on the ancient manuscripts of Sinaiticus and Bezae frame verse 7 as a promise, while verse 7 reads as a reproach in translations that utilize the Vaticanus manuscript.²⁶ J. Ramsey Michaels states that the Vulgate, later Greek manuscripts, and most English versions (including the NIV and NRSV) translate the ancient manuscripts as, “If you all had known me, you would have known my Father too.”²⁷ The NIV reads, “If you really knew me.” C. Cruse notes, “The word ‘really’ has no counterpart in the original language, but has been added by the NIV translators to bring out the sense of Jesus’s statement.”²⁸ Omanson and Metzger argue that the variance in the ancient manuscripts is an added commentary by copyists who remembered Jesus’s reproach against unbelieving Jews in 8:19 or because the dialogue between Philip and Jesus in

²⁵ For this study, the following modern English translations of the Bible *Common English Bible* (CEB), *New International Version* (NIV), *English Standard Version* (ESV), and *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) were used.

²⁶ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4, Sacra Pagina Series, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 398.

²⁷ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John in New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F.F. Bruce, and Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 776.

²⁸ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 294, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

14:8-9 suggested to them that the disciples were ignorant or unaware of the relationship between Jesus and his Father.²⁹

In the Farewell Discourses Jesus offers several promises to his disciples, so it seems reasonable that verse 7 should be translated as a promise from Jesus rather than a reproach to his followers. For Jesus to criticize the disciples at this moment is contrary to the compassionate tone Jesus has in John 13:36-14:31. For example in John 14:1, Jesus tells his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Why would Jesus comfort his disciples then rebuke them in 14:7? Thomas's question does not read as one worthy of criticism. Therefore, the New Revised Standard Version will serve as the modern translation of this exegetical study.

John 14:5-7 in the NRSV reads:

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Study of Key Words and Phrases

At this point of the study, it is important to examine key words and phrases found in John 14:5-7. In 14:6 Jesus answers Thomas’s question with a bold reply and declaratory statement about himself, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” These three words: “way,” “truth,” and “life” are worthy of detailed study, for they reveal a deeper answer than just a location, path, or direction to the place where Jesus is going.

²⁹ Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 200, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

This is the sixth of seven “I am” sayings in the Gospel.³⁰ The use of the “I am” claim personalizes both the question and the answer.³¹

Way in 14:6 is the Koine Greek word ὁδός (*hodós*). The general sense of the word is a way, road, or highway.³² The primary uses of *hodós* in the New Testament reference a way, road, or highway. However, that is not the usage in this context. Instead Jesus is speaking of behavior, actions, attitudes, and way of life. In Acts 9:2, the Christian movement is referred to as “the Way.”

In Gnostic writings from the time of the Gospel, *hodós* is used in reference to the eternal spiritual destiny of the soul.³³ In Gnostic teaching, an individual's soul travels “the way” from heaven to earth and then returns to heaven after death. Gnosticism teaches the way to truth is the way to heavenly light, but the context of this usage does not appear to support Gnostic teaching, but rather suggests “both way and goal.”³⁴

Basil the Great offers this beautiful description of “the way” in *On the Holy Spirit*:

We understand the “way” to be the road to perfection, advancing in order step by step through the words of righteousness and the illumination of knowledge, always yearning for that which lies ahead and straining toward the last mile, until we reach that blessed end, the knowledge of God, with which the Lord blesses those who believe in him. For truly our Lord is a good way, a straight road with

³⁰ The seven “I am” statements can be found in John 6:35, 48,51; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5.

³¹ J. Lanier Burns, “John 14:1-27: The Comfort of God's Presence,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172, no. 687 (2015): 304, accessed April 13, 2018, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

³² Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 691, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

³³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and George W. Bromiley, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 667.

³⁴ Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary*, 669-70.

no confusing forks or turns, leading us directly to the Father. For “no one comes to the Father,” he says, “except through me.” Such is our way up to God through his Son.³⁵

The way is the incarnate *logos* of God in Jesus Christ. Believing in Jesus is walking in the way of his teaching while in relationship with Jesus. The way of Jesus is truth and will lead to the source of all truth, God. We walk along this way with Jesus who is the truth of God’s incarnate word. In the context of this passage, the disciples’ attention is focused on Jesus words of departure and separation. Their fears, expressed by Thomas’s question, reveals their shared ignorance of knowing Jesus as the “way.”³⁶

Truth in 14:6 is the Koine Greek word ἀλήθεια (*alétheia*). The primary meaning of this word is “that which has certainty and force.”³⁷ In the New Testament truth refers to the revelation of God that Jesus brings in his life and teaching.³⁸ In the Synoptic Gospels truth is used to describe the quality and genuineness of teaching. For example, in Luke 20:21 a religious expert tells Jesus, “Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth.” In the Fourth Gospel, truth is often used to describe a message or teaching. For example, in John 8:32 Jesus declares, “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” In 14:6, truth is used as a defining characteristic rather than a message or teaching.

³⁵ Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 124.

³⁶ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 240, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

³⁷ Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary*, 38.

³⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996), 672, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

Craig Keener notes in *The IVP Background Commentary: New Testament*, that:

“Truth” later came to be a Jewish title for God; it is uncertain if it was in use this early. The primary significance of the statement, however, is that Jesus is the embodiment of the truth, God’s covenant faithfulness (1:17), which was embodied in God’s “word” in the Old Testament. (17:17; Ps 119:142, 151)³⁹

For the Gnostics truth was the source of power and life and was seen in the symbol of light.⁴⁰ In his defense of Christianity from Gnosticism, John redeems truth and reminds Christians that Jesus himself is the incarnate word of truth.⁴¹ In his article, “John 14:12-21 as Paradigm for the Wesleyan Understanding of Mission,” Russell Morton offers this perspective about John’s use of truth:

The truth is not the Torah, not the prophetic word of the Hebrew Bible, nor is it an authoritative interpretation of the word by the religious establishment. It is embodied in the person and character of Jesus himself. In this way, we see John radically redefining truth.⁴²

Truth is not special knowledge, but the divine revelation in the person of Jesus Christ.

The disciples are not to seek and follow knowledge, but Jesus himself through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Hilary of Poitiers describes Jesus as the truth in *On the Trinity*. He writes,

He who is the way does not lead us into by-paths or trackless wastes. He who is the truth does not mock us with lies. He who is the life does not betray us into delusions, which are death. He himself has chosen these winning names to

³⁹ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*.

⁴⁰ Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary*, 38.

⁴¹ John 1:14.

⁴² Russell Morton, "John 14:12-21 as Paradigm for the Wesleyan Understanding of Mission," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 93, accessed April 13, 2018, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

indicate the methods that he has appointed for our salvation. As the way, he will guide us to the truth. As the truth, he will establish us in the life.⁴³

The way of Jesus is straight and true. It is the revealed and incarnate will and nature of God. The way of Jesus leads to the source of power and life, but it is not teaching, an idea, or concept of truth. The way is Jesus the incarnate word of God. The way leads to God the Father who is source of all truth and life. Jesus is the embodiment of what we are to know and believe of God and how we are to live as his disciples.⁴⁴

Life in 14:6 is the Koine Greek word ζωή (zōé). The primary meaning of this word is ‘to be alive, to live, life.’⁴⁵ However, in the Bible life can also be used to describe “the transcendent life, *life of God and Christ*.”⁴⁶ In the book of John life is frequently used to speak of a state of being. For example, in John 3:15-16, life is used to describe the eternal state of being of a believer in Christ with God in Heaven. In John 14:6, life is used in the same sense. In his commentary on this passage, Joseph Dongell remarks that, “Jesus has been authorized by His Father (5:25-27) to overturn the physical and spiritual death threatening humankind with total ruin.”⁴⁷ With this in mind, perhaps the writer of John is using both the literal and spiritual meanings of life in 14:6. Jesus will bring both physical and spiritual life to those who trust in him and live in the way of his truth.

In the New Testament, life is the heart of the Christian gospel. Ben Witherington, III notes in *John’s Wisdom*, that life is the theme of the first half of John’s Gospel, while

⁴³ Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 124.

⁴⁴ Vincent, *Word Studies*, 241.

⁴⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 260.

⁴⁶ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 430.

⁴⁷ Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 174.

truth is the theme of the second half.⁴⁸ 1 John 5:20, another text from the Johannine Community, ties both themes together for it reminds us that, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”⁴⁹ In Johannine writing Jesus is the embodied truth and source of true life in God. For the Christian believer the truth and life are confirmed and activated by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is also important to note the how Jesus response is structured grammatically. In a footnote, Francis J. Moloney, remarks how de la Potterie interprets the use of “and” as expexegetical.⁵⁰ An expexegetical use of “and” means the word that comes after “and” explains the word that comes before. In short, Jesus’s affirmation is that he is the “way” and that this way is truth and life.⁵¹ The early Christians seemed to understand and teach this idea in regard to 14:6. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Cyril of Alexandria describes this unique relationship that Jesus embodies as the way, truth, and life. He comments:

And so he himself is the truth, he is the way, that is, the true boundary of faith and the exact rule and standard of an unerring conception concerning God. For by a true belief in the Son, namely, as begotten of the very essence of God the Father and as bearing the title of Son in its fullest and truest meaning—and not even in any sense a made or created being—we shall then clothe ourselves in the confidence of a true faith. For one who has received the Son as a Son has fully confessed a belief also in him of whose essence the Son is, and that person knows and will immediately accept God as the Father. Therefore, he is the truth, he is the

⁴⁸ Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 249.

⁴⁹Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary*, 294.

⁵⁰ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 398.

⁵¹ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 395.

life, for no one else will restore to us the life that is within our hopes, namely, that life that is in incorruption, blessedness and sanctification. For it is he that raises us up and who will bring us back again from the death we died under the ancient curse to the state in which we were at the beginning.⁵²

Understanding the key words of the first part 14:6 brings a better understanding to Jesus's bold declaration, "No one comes to the Father except through me." In the contemporary pluralistic world, this claim is controversial. Many read it as exclusive. Lamar Williamson tries to reconcile this exclusive claim in his article, "Many Rooms, One Way: Preaching John 14 in a Pluralistic Society." His article is an example of how exclusive claims of truth function in a post-Christendom world. In regard to the context and intent of 14:6, Williamson remarks: "It is significant, however, that the target of the exclusive dictum in John 14:6 is not other religions, but an exclusivist interpretation of Moses that viewed Scripture as a way to God and rejected God's incarnate Word."⁵³

Perhaps the focus and intent of Jesus' claim is not teaching of truth as the way to life with the Father, but to draw one into a life-giving relationship with God in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is calling his disciples to know and trust him as a person, not an idea or way of life. D. A. Carson also supports this understanding in his commentary on the text:

In the framework of this Gospel, this exclusivism is directed in at least two directions. First, it is constrained by the salvation-historical consciousness of the Evangelist: *i.e.* now that Jesus has come as the culminating revelation of the Father, it is totally inadequate to claim that one knows God, on the basis of the *antecedent* revelation of bygone epochs, while disowning Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

⁵² Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 125.

⁵³ Lamar Williamson, "Many Rooms, One Way: Preaching John 14 in a Pluralistic Society," *Journal for Preachers* 29, no. 4 (2016): 17, accessed April 13, 2018, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁵⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 491, Logo Bible Software 7.14.

The fundamental focus in this passage is Jesus Christ. Jesus alone is the means to truth and life with God the Father.

All these texts reflect the fact that the life of God was found in Jesus. Therefore, when people come to Jesus they come to the one in whom the life of the Father is found, and in this sense also Jesus is the way to the Father.⁵⁵

If life is found in knowing and believing in the person of Jesus Christ, then religion does not limit this truth claim. The key then to eternal life with God is in the person of Jesus, not claims or teaching about him. Bruce Milne offers another helpful and grace-filled commentary. He remarks:

Jesus alone is the way to God, but he is the way for all, and so whatever the religious background of an individual, or lack of religion, Jesus in his grace welcomes every one of them to the Father if they will come through him.⁵⁶

Saving life in Jesus is possible because the way he journeyed is the way to the cross. Jesus is the only person whose death on a cross forgives and cancels the curse of sin and offers new life through the Spirit in God. There is no other human embodiment of the fulfillment of God's truth and saving grace. Jesus is the way to live in and with the Father. Gail R. O'Day notes, "John is using father and son language as theological metaphor to describe the relationship believers are to have with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit."⁵⁷

In summary, John 14:5-7 is a call to trust in the person of Jesus Christ in the midst of the unknown. One can place one's life in the trust and care of Jesus because Jesus is

⁵⁵ Kruse, *John*, 294.

⁵⁶ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King!: With Study Guide*. The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 212.

⁵⁷ Gail R. O'Day, "'Show us the Father, and We Will be Satisfied' (John 14:8)," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 17, accessed April 16, 2018, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

worthy of trust. Jesus is worthy of trust because he is the embodied and incarnate truth of God. God's truth is power and life. Furthermore, trust in Christ can be affirmed, acknowledged, and activated by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer in Christ. In his journal article, Burns summarizes this thought well, "Hence, "way" does not refer to directions for a journey, but rather a commitment to follow Jesus in the Spirit as in John 12:26."⁵⁸

Internal Study of the Text

With a working translation of John 14:5-7 established and a working understanding of key words and phrases it is now possible to study the internal features of the passage. Again, John 14:5-7 is part of Jesus's Farewell Discourses in John 13-17. In his farewell message, Jesus offers last instructions, guidance, and comfort to the eleven disciples. F.F. Bruce remarks that in this discourse "Jesus offers his spiritual treasures of love, joy, and peace."⁵⁹ In Galatians 5:22, the apostle Paul lists love, joy, and peace as some of the attributes of the fruit of Holy Spirit. Hence, Bruce's comment about these spiritual treasures is appropriate because the Holy Spirit is a repeated theme in Jesus's last teachings. It is important to note that in John 13:30, Judas Iscariot leaves the Upper Room and the rest of the group to go and set his betrayal of Jesus into motion. These themes of belief, trust, and love flow through John 13:31-14:31. The author of John utilizes the misunderstanding motif common in Johannine writing to weave together a series of four questions or requests that are asked of Jesus by Simon Peter in 13:36,

⁵⁸ Burns, 304-5.

⁵⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 294.

Thomas in 14:5, Philip in 14:8, and Judas (not Iscariot) in 14:22 and are followed by Jesus's answers that include essential spiritual promises. Therefore, the main characters in this passage are Jesus, the four disciples who ask Jesus a question or request, and the seven other disciples who are present and listening. This is the small group of faithful men who will remain with Jesus up until his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

To the remaining disciples, Jesus's message is one of perseverance and promise. In 13:31-35 Jesus tells his disciples he is about to leave them, not to be afraid, but rather to "Love one another." Their love for one another and Christ's love from them will give them strength to be faithful. The call to faithfulness is the next theme in 13:16-37. Jesus tells Peter that he will deny him; yet, in the end, Peter will not lose complete faith in Christ for he will declare his love for Christ three times.⁶⁰ In 14:1-31, Jesus addresses the disciples' fears and worries by urging them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." Belief and trust in the love of God will help these men face the tribulation, trouble, and trial that await them with the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Cyril of Alexandria remarked in his commentary on this passage, "In commanding them not to be troubled, Jesus placed them, as it were, on the threshold between hope and fear."⁶¹ Though Jesus will be leaving the disciples, they will not be dislocated, abandoned, or devoid of power and help. Their faith and hope in Jesus will not be in vain or without reward.

Again, the first question in this pericope is in 13:16. Peter asks Jesus, "Where are you going?" Jesus does not offer a complete answer but tells Peter in 13:17, "Where I am

⁶⁰ John 21:15-19.

⁶¹ Elowsky, *John 1-10*, 120.

going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” Peter wants to know why he is unable to follow Jesus now. In 13:18, Jesus uses his answer to reveal Peter’s failure of nerve when faced with denying Jesus three separate times. However, this revelation of future failure is followed by a word of comfort and a promise.

In John 14:2-4, Jesus gives this first promise to his disciples:

In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.

In 14:5, Thomas raises the second significant question in the passage, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” In John 14:6-7, Jesus answers Thomas and gives the second promise to his disciples:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also.

In John 14:8, Phillip does not ask a question of Jesus but rather makes this request, "Show us the Father." Jesus replies to Philip's request with a series of questions. Jesus responds to what appears to be the rhetorical questions in John 13:9-10 with a series of statements about his divine identity and spiritual promises in John 14:11-14:

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

In John 14:15-17, Jesus gives the disciples this promise of the Holy Spirit,

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

The promise of the Holy Spirit unites and holds the promises in this passage together. The question and answer dialogue in John 13:31-14:31 builds upon itself while stressing throughout the importance of a vital relationship with Jesus and the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit. In the future times of uncertainty and unknown, the Spirit will represent Jesus and the Father and lead them to that secure and eternal place of spiritual relationship with God in the Father's house.⁶²

One should remember that John was likely writing this Gospel to Christian believers. These words of promise were probably as calls to action. In other words, “[the believers] need to stop making excuses and move forward, trusting in God’s promises and the Holy Spirit to be faithful in helping them complete greater works for the Kingdom of God.”⁶³

When faced with uncertainty, it is easy to stop and do nothing. Doing nothing is not the theme in this passage. As they journey into the uncharted territory, Jesus gives them a call to action, “Trust me.” This is a call to not just trust in his teachings, but to trust him as the incarnate word of God. The disciples’ trust in Jesus will be evident in their love of Jesus and God. Their love for Jesus and God will be put into action through faithfulness and living out the new commandment of Jesus which is, “Love one another.” It is not enough for the disciples to simply remember what Jesus has taught them. They must place their trust in him. Their act of faithful trust will enable the Holy Spirit to empower and guide them. The Holy Spirit will confirm their faith and enable them to

⁶² Dongell, *John*, 173.

⁶³ Jaime Clark-Soles, “John 14:1-7: Exegetical Perspective,” in *Feasting on the Gospels: John*, vol. 2, eds., Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 145.

know that in the end, they will find their place in God's eternal care.⁶⁴ In 14:31, the narrative and scene end rather abruptly with Jesus command to “Rise, let us be on our way.”

External Study of the Text

It is helpful to consider the place John 13:31-14:31 holds in this section of the Gospel. In John 13, Jesus and his disciples gather in the Upper Room in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jesus, the *Logos*, teaches and models the way of faithful discipleship. In 13:1-16, Jesus washes his disciples' feet. This is an act of humble service. In 13:18-30, Jesus and the disciples eat the Passover meal, but during the meal, Jesus reveals that he will be betrayed. The narrative is rich with detail and emotion. The author's testimony pulls the reader into the room. Such vivid details add support to the claim that one of the disciples wrote the Fourth Gospel. Donald Guthrie notes:

The various details—the disciples looking at one another, the beloved disciple lying close to Jesus, the beckoning action of Peter, the whispered conversation and Jesus's deliberate and symbolic response—are so vividly told that the account must come first-hand from an eyewitness.⁶⁵

With Judas's departure from the Upper Room in 13:30, we come to the selected passage under review. It is important to note that some scholars disagree with the placement of John 13:31-14:31. Bultmann argues that an editor moved the passage to its current location and that the discourse should actually follow John 17.⁶⁶ The majority of

⁶⁴ Paul affirms this in Romans 8:12-17.

⁶⁵ Guthrie, “John,” 1054.

⁶⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trns. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 595.

scholars hold that John 15-17 takes place as Jesus and the disciples journey to the Kidron Valley.⁶⁷ The discourse in John 15-17 continues the general themes of John 13:31-14:31. It reads as the continuation and expansion of a discussion. In John 15-17, Jesus continues to encourage the disciples to be faithful, to trust in God, and to know that the Holy Spirit will come to their aid in the face of uncertainty and difficulty.

H.B.H. Bevan offers a new and thoughtful perspective on the link between 14:31 and 15:1. Bevan interprets "Arise, let us go" not in a physical sense but a spiritual one. Bevan sees 14:31 as a call for the Disciples to enter into the movement of the new spiritual reality that Christ will begin with his journey to death on a cross.⁶⁸ This interpretation adds another possibility to the connections between John 14-17 and their placement in the Gospel, but it does not significantly change the general theme of this section of John.

This section of the Gospel closes when Judas, who departed in 13:30, returns in 18:2. From this point on the Gospel focuses on the glorification of Jesus through his betrayal, arrest, death, and resurrection.

The structure of the Farewell Discourse is similar to the Old Testament passages of final words given by leaders to their followers. Farewell Discourses were common in Jewish literature from the Ancient Near East. D.A. Carson notes similar farewell themes in the Old Testament discourses including Jacob's last words to his sons, Joshua's final

⁶⁷ Guthrie, "John," 1056.

⁶⁸ H. B. H. Bevan, "Does 'Arise, Let Us go Hence' (John 14:31D) Make Sense Where it Stands?" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 54, no. 2 (October 2003): 576-584, accessed March 12, 2018, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

remarks to his people, and David's address to Solomon and to the nation.⁶⁹ Carson comments on this similarity between Israel and Jesus: "Just as Israel is about to enter the promised land, the departing Moses addresses the covenant community; just as Jesus's disciples are about to enter the age of the Spirit, the departing Jesus addresses the new covenant community."⁷⁰

The promise of the Holy Spirit as a guide who will lead the disciples through uncertainty harkens back to God's promise and guidance to the people of Israel in Exodus 13:21: "The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night."

Once again, God promises to lead, guide, and direct the faithful into and through the wilderness and unknown of uncharted territory until they arrive in the promised place of God's rest and the new community of God's people. The disciples now must make the decision of faith to trust in Jesus and follow in his way, so they can live now and in eternity. In essence, John 14:5-7 is another call to have personal faith in the power and presence of God. The promises of this passage come from God the Father, they are revealed through Jesus Christ the incarnate word of God and will be confirmed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 480.

⁷⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 480.

Concluding Thoughts

Hopefully after this exegetical study of John 14:5-7, one sees the importance of understanding the necessity of belief and trust in the person of Jesus Christ. In the days of the early church, the heresy of Gnosticism sought to spiritualize the teaching of Christ. For the Gnostics, knowledge was the source of power and spiritual life. The Gnostic's special knowledge would lead them from the darkness and into light. The Gospel of John was written to clarify Christ's teaching, but also to call Christians into renewed faith in and relationship with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. John 14:5-7 is a strong example of the spiritual and theological importance of trust in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the post-Christendom world in which the church now exists, it is important for leaders to revisit the heretical teaching of Gnosticism. As the church seeks to transform the world by transforming people we need to be mindful of the means we embrace. Bolsinger argues that transformation occurs at the intersection of technical competence, relational congruence, and adaptive capacity.⁷¹ There is great danger in focusing on technical competence and adaptive capacity through knowledge and skill development, while not recognizing the use of knowledge as a contemporary expression of the ancient teachings of Gnosticism. In other words, in the end knowledge and skill in themselves will not lead to spiritual transformation. Spiritual transformation can only happen as a result of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In John 13-7 and especially in 14:5-7, Jesus stresses the importance of faith in him and not just in the teaching he proclaimed. Bultmann offers the following explanation of this idea:

⁷¹ Bolsinger, 43.

Jesus is the truth; he does not simply state it. One does not come to him to ask about truth; one comes to him as the truth. This truth does not exist as a doctrine, which could be understood, preserved, and handed on, so that the teacher is discharged and surpassed. Rather the position a man takes vis-à-vis the Revealer decides not whether he knows the truth, but whether his is “of the truth,” that is to say, whether his existence is determined by the truth, whether the truth is the ground on which his existence is based.⁷²

One must not simply know of Jesus or his teachings, but rather know Jesus. Knowing Jesus, or having relationship with Jesus, comes through faith by grace. This work of faith by grace is the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

A systematic discipleship program that provides a means for watching over each other in love can provide a means for transformational leaders to develop. Such transformational leaders must not only seek to grow in knowledge and skills, but to be and to stay in relationship with Jesus. Transformational leaders must have faith in Jesus and be guided by the abiding presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Transformational leaders can only effectively lead the church in uncertain times as they abide with Christ who is the way and will reveal truth and give life. As the global church moves forward into uncharted territory of ministry in post-Christendom and Greensboro First United Methodist Church ministers in its changing context, may these words of Thomas à Kempis be our guide as we seek to walk with and in “The Way, the Truth, and the Life:”

Without the Way, there is no going; without the Truth, there is no knowing; without the Life, there is no living. I am the Way, you are to follow. I am the truth you are to believe. I am the Life, you are to hope for. I am the Way that cannot be destroyed, the Truth that cannot be wrong, the Life cannot be ended. I am the Way that is most straight, the supreme Truth, the true Life, the blessed Life, the Life, begotten, not made.

If continue in my way you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. You will have eternal life.⁷³

⁷² Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 606-607.

⁷³ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ: A New Reading*, trans. William C. Creasy (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), 121.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

On April 23, 2018, the United Methodist Church celebrated the 50th anniversary of its formation which was the result of the merger of the Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren Churches at the organizational General Conference in Dallas, Texas. The United Methodist Church became a new denomination when Bishop Reuben H. Muller, of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and Bishop Lloyd C. Wicke, of the Methodist Church, joined hands and declared, “Lord of the Church, we are united in Thee, in Thy Church and now in The United Methodist Church.”¹ The formation of the United Methodist Church in 1968 was the conclusion of dialogue and ecumenical work that had begun some twenty years earlier. The season of the late 1940s and early 1950s, was a unique time when churches of various denominations and backgrounds across the world were working together to help bring peace, order, and healing from the ravages of World War Two.²

¹ The People of the United Methodist Church, “Formation of The United Methodist Church,” *A Resource for Mission and Ministry*, accessed May 7, 2018, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/formation-of-the-united-methodist-church>.

² The People of the United Methodist Church, “Quest for Unity,” *The United Methodist Church: Who We Are*, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/movement-toward-union>.

On April 30, 2018, just a few days after the 50th anniversary of the church's formation, the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church convened in Chicago, Illinois, to pray, discern, and plan how the church can move forward as a united witness despite various differences on theology, practice of ministry, and social and moral concerns that are presently sources of disagreement and division. The 2016 General Conference entrusted the church's bishops with developing a way forward in united mission and ministry. In response to the General Conference's charge, the Council of Bishops formed the Commission on a Way Forward. In his opening sermon to the Council, the Council's president, Bishop Bruce R. Ough, reminded the episcopal leaders that they are tasked to "design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness, allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible and creates as much unity as possible."³

The Special General Conference of 2019 did not find a way to create unity in the denomination. The 2020 General Conference could possibly bring about the division of The United Methodist Church. Greensboro First is trying to make disciples in a changing context. The church is also trying to make disciples in a denomination that could soon be no longer united. This uncertainty raises the importance and need for transformational leaders. The merger of 1968, General Conference 2019, and the upcoming 2020 General Conference, bring to mind these prophetic words of caution and concern written by Rev. John Wesley on August 4, 1786 in his essay "Thoughts Upon Methodism:"

³ Bruce R. Ough, "What Do You Want Me to do for You?: Mark 10: 35-52" (sermon presented at the Council of Bishops meeting of The United Methodist Church, Chicago, Illinois, April 29, 2018), accessed May 7, 2018, http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/council-of-bishops/news_and_statements/documents/BishopOughSermon_April29.pdf.

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.⁴

Though over 200 years old, Wesley's words offer a timely description of the United Methodist Church as it exists today.

This historical foundation chapter will attempt to analyze Wesley's words of concern in "Thoughts Upon Methodism" by reviewing the origins of the Methodist movement in Europe and America. Study of the beginning of the Methodist movement can provide insights into the foundations that birthed a revival of spiritual transformation and renewal that continues around the world to this day. This attempt to discern Wesley's motivation for writing "Thoughts Upon Methodism," by placing it in its historic context will conclude with a summary of the doctrine, spirit, and discipline that were fundamental and defining to early Methodism.

This study of "Thoughts Upon Methodism" will provide a historic foundation that is meant to help today's Methodist movement identify and rediscover the source and means of the transformative spiritual power that was such a vital characteristic of the first 100 years of the Methodist movement. In addition, this study of the history of the movement can also facilitate the discovery of best practices that support the work of renewal and transformation in a time of uncertainty. Finally, this study will help develop foundations for a systematic discipleship formation program that can develop

⁴ John Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Methodism," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 13 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 258, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

transformative leaders. This systematic program will also provide a means of watching over each other in love.

The Beginnings of the Methodist Movement

Although in “Thoughts Upon Methodism” Wesley reminisced that the Methodist movement began in 1729 first as the Holy Club at Oxford University, one could argue that Methodism actually began in the rectory at Epworth where the Wesley family lived. John Wesley was born in 1708 to Rev. Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Samuel Wesley came from a long line of Dissenters, but despite his rearing, he attended Oxford and Cambridge and was an ordained minister in the Church of England.⁵ Samuel’s religious practices, beliefs, and writings reveal his embracing of Pietism.⁶ Samuel Wesley was a learned man and spent much time in study and writing, characteristics that were passed on to his son John. One could label Samuel as a socially progressive clergy for his time. Samuel’s writings show his concern about various social issues of his time including prison reform.⁷ Later on, the Methodist movement would embrace social reform as a vital part of religious renewal.

John’s mother, Susanna Wesley, came from a long line of Puritans. Puritans were non-conformists who held a deep respect for Scripture, which they considered to be

⁵ Arthur Alan Torpy, “The Prevenient Piety of Samuel Wesley, Sr.” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2006), 20, accessed May 8, 2018, https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/baylor-ir/bitstream/handle/2104/4826/Art_Torpy_phd.pdf;sequence=1.

⁶ Torpy, “The Prevenient Piety of Samuel Wesley,” 200.

⁷ Torpy, “The Prevenient Piety of Samuel Wesley,” 212.

divinely inspired and authoritative.⁸ Puritans held fast to, and taught the biblical doctrines of justification and sanctification with scholarly acumen and pastoral passion.⁹ Puritan theology was evangelistic and practical for it called people to place every aspect of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ The Puritan way of disciplined life was evident in the Wesley house. Halford Luccock suggests that Susanna's middle name could well have been "method," and she put the "method" in Methodism, for she operated a highly organized home and was methodical in her approach to raising her many children.¹¹ On a weekly basis, Susanna would take the time to personally inquire about the spiritual health of each child. This time of personal examination would later become a foundational practice of Methodist accountability and discipleship. The Epworth rectory provided a hospitable environment where Samuel and Susanna Wesley planted seeds of spiritual renewal and transformation into the lives of their children. At Oxford, these seeds would sprout in the hearts and religious experience of John and Charles Wesley.

In "Thoughts Upon Methodism," Wesley remarked on what he called the "first rise of Methodism." He wrote:

In the year 1729 four young students in Oxford agreed to spend their evenings together. They were all zealous members of the Church of England, and had no peculiar opinions, but were distinguished only by their constant attendance on the church and sacrament.¹²

⁸ Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 354, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

⁹ Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 354.

¹⁰ Cairn, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 354.

¹¹ Halford E. Luccock, *Endless Life of Splendor* (Chicago, IL: The Methodist Church, 1951), 11.

¹² John Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Methodism," 258.

At Oxford, Wesley led the Holy Club in reading and studying the Scriptures and putting their faith into action through service to the poor and imprisoned. The club's strict standards of behavior and spiritual discipline drew suspicion from the community. It was in Oxford that the term "Methodist" was first attributed to Wesley and the Holy Club.¹³ The Oxford Methodists were wrongly accused by local newspapers of living an ascetic life that denied or mortified human desire in an attempt to gain salvation. These claims came about from the death of William Morgan, one of the Holy Club members, from complications of tuberculosis in 1732.¹⁴

A few years later, in 1735, John Wesley would leave Oxford and sail to the British colonies in North America. Samuel encouraged John and Charles to join the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and become missionaries to Georgia. On the sea passage to Georgia, John would meet Moravians who were also headed to the colony. The three-month passage to Georgia was not easy. Three times their ship, *The Simmons*, had to sail through violent storms. On Sunday, January 25, 1736, the third violent storm almost sank the ship off the coast of Georgia. Wesley wrote of the experience in his journal:

At noon our third storm began. At four it was more violent than before. Now, indeed, we could say, "The waves of the sea were mighty, and raged horribly. They rose up to the heavens above, and" clave "down to hell beneath." The winds roared round about us, and (what I never heard before) whistled as distinctly as if it had been a human voice. The ship not only rocked to and fro with the utmost violence, but shook and jarred with so unequal, grating a motion, that one could not but with great difficulty keep one's hold of anything, nor stand a moment without it. Every ten minutes came a shock against the stern or side of the ship, which one would think should dash the planks in pieces. At this time a child, privately baptized before, was brought to be received into the church. It put me in

¹³ W. Harrison Daniel, *Historical Atlas of the Methodist Movement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 12.

¹⁴ Daniel, *Historical Atlas*, 12.

mind of Jeremiah's buying the field, when the Chaldeans were on the point of destroying Jerusalem and seemed a pledge of the mercy God designed to show us, even in the land of the living.¹⁵

At the same time, the German Moravians were singing psalms of praise and thanksgiving. These Moravians had impressed Wesley with their gentle and humble Christian witness. In the midst of this terrible storm their lack of fear challenged Wesley's own faith. He noted this in his journal entry:

At seven I went to the Germans. I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behaviour. Of their humility they had given a continual proof, by performing those servile offices for the other passengers, which none of the English would undertake; for which they desired, and would receive no pay, saying, "it was good for their proud hearts," and "their loving Saviour had done more for them." And every day had given them occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth. There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, "Was you not afraid?" He answered, "I thank God, no." I asked, "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied, mildly, "No; our women and children are not afraid to die." From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbours, and pointed out to them the difference in the hour of trial, between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not. At twelve the wind fell. This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen.¹⁶

On Saturday, February 7, 1736, Wesley would meet Mr. Spangenberg, one of the Moravian pastors, who was living in Georgia. Spangenberg asked Wesley directly about the state of his soul. Apparently, Spangenberg's question challenged Wesley's sense of spiritual assurance. He wrote of the experience his journal:

¹⁵ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 21.

¹⁶ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 21-22.

Mr. Oglethorpe returned from Savannah with Mr. Spangenberg, one of the Pastors of the Germans. I soon found what spirit he was of; and asked his advice with regard to my own conduct. He said, "My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?" I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" I paused, and said, "I know he is the Saviour of the world." "True," replied he; "but do you know he has saved you?" I answered, "I hope he has died to save me." He only added, "Do you know yourself?" I said, "I do." But I fear they were vain words.¹⁷

Wesley's missionary expedition to Georgia turned into a complicated endeavor and failure. Charles quickly grew frustrated with his work as government administrator for General Oglethorpe and returned to England in July of 1736.¹⁸ John had a romantic mis-step with Sophia Hopkey, niece of one of the colonial judges, and had to flee Georgia under the cover of night for fear of arrest.¹⁹ While on his return passage to England, Wesley wrote a sobering reflection of his ministry and mission work in Georgia. Wesley's words are stark, honest, and convicting:

It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country, in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity: But what have I learned myself in the mean time? Why, (what I the least of all suspected,) that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.* "I am not mad," though I thus speak; but "I speak the words of truth and soberness;" if haply some of those who still dream may awake, and see, that as I am, so are they.²⁰

¹⁷ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 23.

¹⁸ Daniel, *Historical Atlas*, 14.

¹⁹ Wesley courted Ms. Hopkey but would not commit to marriage. Ms. Hopkey grew frustrated and married another gentleman. When the newlyweds came to worship, Wesley denied his former girlfriend Holy Communion. Wesley's actions created a social scandal and Ms. Hopkey's uncle issued a warrant for John's arrest.

In his journal's footnotes, Wesley later remarked “* I am not sure of this.” This could be an example of Wesley's own personal experience of having “the form of religion without the power.”

One might conclude from these words that the Methodist movement died in Georgia. Such a conclusion is far from the case, for Wesley's failure in Georgia stirred his heart to find the assurance of faith that he had seen so vividly in the life and witness of the Moravians. Wesley began to seek the same spiritual assurance that Spangenberg held and inquired of him. Thankfully, Wesley did not give up his quest for spiritual assurance.

On February 7, 1738, John and Charles Wesley met Moravian preacher Peter Böhler in London. Böhler and the Wesley brothers began a series of long discussions about assurance by faith. According to John's journal, during this same time he was required to give a series of reports to General Oglethorpe and the Trustees of the Georgia Colony about his reasons for leaving the colony.²¹ Wesley had left Georgia, but he was still being held responsible for his actions and failure in the colony. His Georgia troubles had followed him to London.

On March 4, John returned to Oxford. In Oxford, he reunited with his brother Charles. According to his journal, Charles was in poor health and was being visited by Peter Böhler. In their time together, Böhler apparently continued to encourage John and Charles to seek assurance of salvation by faith. John recorded in his journal this hopeful word of encouragement that Böhler offered him:

I was, on *Sunday*, the 5th, clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved (with full Christian salvation). Immediately it struck

²¹ See the entries for February 4, 8, 15, and 22, 1738 in Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1.

into my mind, “Leave off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?” I asked Böhler, whether he thought I should leave it off or not. He answered, “By no means.” I asked, “But what can I preach?” He said, “Preach faith *till* you have it; and then, *because* you have it, you *will* preach faith.”²²

Böhler’s conversations with John in Oxford provided a theological reset and reorientation for the Methodist movement. From this time onward, John’s preaching and ministry would focus on the assurance of salvation by faith alone. However, it is important to remember that John had not personally experienced the gift of assurance by faith. John was following Böhler’s advice to “Preach faith till you have it.”

Wesley’s journal entries over the next several weeks revealed his heartfelt quest for faith. Wesley was not on this quest alone. On May 1, 1738, Wesley and Böhler formed the Fetter Lane Society, a new version of the Oxford Holy Club, that was organized in the style of a Moravian discipleship band.²³ Journal entries describe how Böhler repeatedly comforts and encourages Wesley in personal conversations and correspondence. Böhler’s letter, dated May 8, 1738, is especially uplifting. The translated text reads:

I love you greatly, and think much of you in my journey, wishing and praying that the tender mercies of Jesus Christ the Crucified, whose bowels were moved towards you more than six thousand years ago, may be manifested to your soul: That you may taste and then see, how exceedingly the Son of God has loved you, and loves you still; and that so you may continually trust in Him, and feel his life in yourself. Beware of the sin of unbelief; and if you have not conquered it yet, see that you conquer it this very day, through the blood of Jesus Christ. Delay not, I beseech you, to believe in *your* Jesus Christ; but so put Him in mind of his promises to poor sinners, that He may not be able to refrain from doing for you, what He hath done for so many others. O how great, how inexpressible, how unexhausted is his love! Surely he is now ready to help; and nothing can offend Him but our unbelief.

²² Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 86.

²³ Kevin M. Watson and Scott T. Kisker, *The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017), 83.

The Lord bless you! Abide in faith, love, teaching, the communion of saints; and briefly, in all which we have in the New Testament. I am, Your unworthy Brother, Peter Böhler.”²⁴

On May 24, 1738, Böhler’s prophetic words of encouragement would be fulfilled when John experienced his assurance of salvation while attending a Moravian Bible study that was meeting at a home on Aldersgate Street in London. Wesley wrote these world-famous words of his personal assurance in his journal entry on that same date:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.²⁵

Soon after Wesley’s heart-warming experience at Aldersgate, the Methodist movement gained momentum that to this day continues across the world. Wesley began to preach the gospel with a new sense of power and authority. He had received the spiritual power that comes from the witness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer.

In the summer of 1738, Wesley traveled to Germany to visit the Moravian community of Herrnhut. While in Herrnhut, Wesley met the Moravian leader Nicholas von Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf clarified some doctrinal differences between the English Moravians, led by Böhler, and the Germans whom he led.²⁶ In Herrnhut, Wesley gained a better understanding of the choir and band system the Moravians used to organize their

²⁴ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 94-95.

²⁵ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 103.

²⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2013), 90-98.

community. Though worship was part of their practice, the choirs and bands were not musical groups but rather saw to the spiritual and discipleship needs of its members.

Though the Fetter Lane Society was modeled like a Moravian band, Wesley would adapt and structure the Methodist class and band systems from the example of the Moravian choirs he saw functioning in Herrnhut.²⁷

When Wesley returned to England, he soon found himself feeling pressure and backlash from the establishment. After preaching sermons that were deemed controversial by some of his clergy peers, Wesley found himself prohibited from preaching in many Anglican Churches and being accused of preaching new doctrines.²⁸ Methodist historian Kenneth Cain Kinghorn argues that during the days of Wesley, “The Church of England had fallen into decline because it had neglected the essential doctrines on which it was founded.”²⁹ Wesley and the Methodists were leading a renewal movement within the established church focused on reclaiming the church’s foundational message and mission.

Like wildfire, Methodism spread across 18th century England. Wesley organized classes and bands across his homeland. The bands and classes took the name “The United Societies of the People Called Methodists.” The United Societies were not a separate church, but Wesley considered them to be a renewal movement within the official established structure of the Church of England.³⁰ Wesley traveled across England

²⁷ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 92-93.

²⁸ Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 13.

²⁹ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 13.

³⁰ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 103.

preaching, teaching, and establishing Methodist societies for discipleship and spiritual accountability. In April 1739, George Whitfield introduced John Wesley to the unorthodox practice of field preaching.³¹ It soon became common practice for John Wesley to preach in a community, then organize the people in that community who responded to his preaching and who wanted to grow as disciples of Jesus into an organized local Methodist society. This ministry approach was very successful. By 1783, Methodism in England had grown to such a significant membership, complex organizational structure, and leadership hierarchy that it needed to form an official legal structure that would ensure the movement would continue after John Wesley's death.³² In 1784, the Deed of Declaration would mark the legal beginning of what would transform a revival movement into a denomination separated from the Church of England in 1795.³³ John Wesley was born into and in 1791 died as an ordained clergy member of the Church of England.

Methodism in America

Though John Wesley's missionary endeavor to Georgia was relatively short-lived and unsuccessful, it did not mark the end of the Methodist movement in America. As the United Societies grew in membership and number across Great Britain, it did not take long for the Methodist movement to cross the Atlantic and take root in the British colonies in North America. By the late 1760s, two Irish colonists who had been converted

³¹ Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), 28.

³² Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 313.

³³ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 314.

by Methodist preaching in Ireland and were lay preachers organized an expression of a class meeting in the American Colonies. In 1768 John Taylor, a Methodist colonist, wrote a letter to John Wesley requesting that he send a qualified preacher to help the fledgling Methodist movement in America. Taylor's letter expressed the earnest desire the American Methodists had for Methodist clergy to guide and direct them. Taylor concluded his letter with these words, "With respect to the money for payment of a preacher's passage over . . . we would sell our coats and shirts to pay it."³⁴ From 1769 to 1774, Wesley sent twelve British Methodists preachers to serve as missionaries to the Methodists in the American colonies.³⁵ Unfortunately, the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776 complicated the missionary movement of the British Methodists in the colonies.

The American Revolution created an environment of suspicion toward Anglican clergy serving in the colonies, including the Methodists missionaries. Some of the Methodist missionaries were ordained Anglican clergy. All ordained Anglican clergy pledge an oath of loyalty to the throne, for the King of England was also the head of the Church of England. Their oath to the throne gave good cause for the American Patriots to question the loyalty of Anglican clergy to their fight for independence from the King of England. Out of a spirit of caution, or perhaps fear, all of the British Methodists preachers, except for Francis Asbury, returned to England as hostilities and suspicion toward them grew in the American colonies.³⁶

³⁴ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 14.

³⁵ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 14.

³⁶ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 14.

As the American Revolution continued and it became more and more evident that the American cause would prevail, John Wesley saw the need for the American Methodists to be independent of the British movement and the need for the American church to be empowered to ordain its own ministers.³⁷ Condoning separation was not an easy decision for Wesley. In his “Letter to Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and Our Brethren in North America” dated September 10, 1784, Wesley laid out these decisions and the rationale behind separate ordination for American preachers. In this letter, he described the lack of support he received from the Bishop of London in ordaining and sending missionaries to the newly independent United States. The English Bishops also failed to consecrate a bishop for America, signaling a lack of concern for the spiritual needs of the colonies.³⁸

In addition, the letter described Wesley’s adaptive plan to solve the ordination issue for the American Methodists. Wesley ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to be ministers in America. The letter also conveyed Wesley’s wishes for Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury to be consecrated as superintendents over the American Methodists and their movement.³⁹ Wesley’s concluding remarks in this letter summarized his hopes for his American brethren:

As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State, and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.⁴⁰

³⁷ Daniel, *Historical Atlas of the Methodist Movement*, 26.

³⁸ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 43.

³⁹ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 15.

⁴⁰ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 252.

With the blessing of Wesley, the American Methodists met in Baltimore, Maryland on December 24, 1784, to organize a new denomination for the Methodists in the new nation. The “Christmas Conference” began with the reading of Wesley’s letter to Coke, Asbury, and the American preachers dated September 10, 1784.⁴¹ The conference officially organized the Methodist Episcopal Church and ordained Coke and Asbury to be its bishops, not superintendents as Wesley had directed and desired. This action was not received well by Wesley. In 1788, four years after Asbury’s consecration as bishop, Wesley was still concerned about the title, for he wrote the following concern to Bishop Asbury:

One instance of this, of your greatness, has given me great concern. How can you, how dare you, suffer yourself to be called Bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought! Men may call me a knave or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content: But they shall never, by my consent, call me Bishop! For my sake, for God’s sake, for Christ’s sake, put a full end to this! Let the Presbyterians do what they please, but let the Methodists know their calling better.⁴²

At the Christmas Conference, The Methodist Episcopal Church adopted the Twenty-Five articles of Religion as its doctrinal standards. John Wesley had personally edited and adapted the Methodist Articles of Religion from the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.⁴³ The Conference also established Wesley’s Fifty-two Standard Sermons and his *Notes Upon the New Testament* as additional doctrinal standards.⁴⁴ With

⁴¹ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 46.

⁴² Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 75.

⁴³ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 47.

⁴⁴ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 47

the action and organization of the Christmas Conference, what had been a movement within the established church had now become and was becoming an established church.

The Historical Context of Thoughts Upon Methodism

This brief survey of the foundation of the Methodist movement and the Methodist Episcopal Church enables one to better understand the historical context in which Wesley wrote “Thoughts Upon Methodism.” On July 25, 1786, the preachers of the United Societies met for their annual conference in Bristol. The minutes of the conference note some important details that likely influenced Wesley’s writing of “Thoughts Upon Methodism.”

First, the minutes note the death of John Fletcher including a description of Fletcher as, “a pattern of holiness, scarce to be paralleled in a century.”⁴⁵ Fletcher was a skilled theologian, compassionate pastor, and proven leader in the Methodist movement. In 1773, Wesley chose Fletcher to become his heir who would lead and direct the Methodists after his death.⁴⁶ Sadly, Fletcher died on August 12, 1785. After his death, Wesley wrote a short book about Fletcher’s life and ministry. In the book’s conclusion, Wesley shared the following heartfelt sentiment:

I was intimately acquainted with him for thirty years. I conversed with him morning, noon, and night, without the least reserve, during a journey of many hundred miles; and in all that time I never heard him speak an improper word, or saw him do an improper action. To conclude: Within fourscore years, I have

⁴⁵ *Minutes of Some Late Conversations Between the Rev. Messrs. Wesley and Others* (Bristol, England: printed by Bulger and Rosser, 1786), 4, Google Books.

⁴⁶ Clay Morgan, “Leadership Lessons from John Wesley and Successor John Fletcher,” United Methodist Communications, accessed May 3, 2018, <http://www.umcom.org/learn/leadership-lessons-from-john-wesley-and-successor-john-fletcher>.

known many excellent men, holy in heart and life: But one equal to him, I have not known; one so uniformly and deeply devoted to God. So unblamable a man, in every respect, I have not found either in Europe or America. Nor do I expect to find another such on this side eternity.⁴⁷

Clearly the death of Fletcher impacted Wesley and likely raised concerns about who would continue the Methodist movement into the next generation.

Secondly, the minutes and Wesley's journal note that Coke was in attendance at the conference. Coke gave a report about the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church in America.⁴⁸ The conference minutes also included a discourse by Wesley entitled, "Of Separation from the Church" that he wrote in August 1785. In this discourse, Wesley defended his actions in regard to ordaining clergy for the American church, and further insisted that his actions were done out of great necessity for the spiritual care of the Methodists in the new nation. Wesley insisted:

Judging this to be a case of real necessity, I took a step which, for peace and quietness, I had refrained from taking for many years; I exercised that power which I am fully persuaded the great Shepherd and Bishop of the church has given me. I appointed three of our labourers to go and help them, by not only preaching the word of God, but likewise by administering the Lord's supper and baptizing their children, throughout that vast tract of land, a thousand miles long, and some hundreds broad.⁴⁹

The minutes also included a postscript to "Of Separation from the Church" that reveal Wesley's growing concern about the future of the Methodist movement in Europe and America. It is especially important to take note of Wesley's concern, "But what I said

⁴⁷ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 11, 365.

⁴⁸ *Minutes*, 3.

⁴⁹ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 256.

at our first Conference, above forty years ago, I say still, “I dare not omit doing what good I can while I live, for fear of evils that may follow when I am dead.”⁵⁰

Lastly, the conference minutes conclude with what Wesley called, “A few little Advices” for the assistants and preachers. These directions reveal the changes that had already taken place in the renewal movement. Wesley encouraged the following:

I advise the Assistants:

1. To reestablish Morning Preaching, in all large towns, at least.
2. To exert themselves in restoring the bands.
3. And the select Societies.
4. Change both a General and Particular Steward in each Circuit.

I advise the Preachers.

1. Always conclude the service in about an hour.
2. Never scream.
3. Never lean upon, or beat the Bible.
4. Wherever you preach, meet the Society.
5. Do not, without the utmost necessity, go home at night.
6. Never take part against the Assistant.
7. Never preach a Funeral Sermon, but for an eminently holy person: Nor then, without consulting the Assistant. Preach none for hire. Beware of Panegyric, particularly in London.
8. Have Love Feasts in more places.
9. Introduce no new tunes. See that none sing too slow, and the women sing their parts. Exhort all to sing, and all to stand at singing, as well to kneel at prayers.
10. Let none repeat the last line, unless the Preacher does.
11. Inform the Leaders, that every Assistant is to change both the Stewards and Leaders when he sees good. And that no Leader has Power to put any person either into or out of the Society.⁵¹

The anniversary of the death of John Fletcher, Cokes’ report about the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Coke and Asbury’s adoption of the title bishop, and evident changes in the United Societies in England—all these events likely inspired John Wesley to pen “Thoughts Upon Methodism” on August 4, 1786. Wesley clearly had

⁵⁰ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 257.

⁵¹ *Minutes*, 23.

growing concerns about the future of his beloved Methodist movement. He did not want Methodism to forget and stray away from the “Doctrine, Spirit, and Discipline” in which it had begun. While Wesley had planned for Fletcher to lead and ensure faithful transmission of his wishes into the next generation, Fletcher’s sudden death in 1785 terminated those plans. The Americans were now an independent church with an independent spirit, and he was losing more and more control and input on the way the American church operated.

Summary of the Doctrine, Spirit, and Discipline of Early Methodism

A summary of the doctrine, spirit, and discipline of the early Methodist movement will provide a helpful conclusion to the analysis of Wesley’s “Thoughts Upon Methodism.”

The Doctrine and Spirit of Early Methodism

In “Thoughts Upon Methodism,” Wesley summarized the fundamental doctrines of the movement as:

[T]he Bible is the whole and sole rule both of Christian faith and practice. Hence . . . (1.) . . . [R]eligion is an inward principle; that it is no other than the mind that was in Christ; or, in other words, the renewal of the soul after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. (2.) [T]his can never be wrought in us, but by the power of the Holy Ghost. (3.) [W]e receive this, and every other blessing, merely for the sake of Christ: And, (4.) [W]hosoever hath the mind that was in Christ, the same is our brother, and sister, and mother.⁵²

Methodist Historian Kenneth C. Kinghorn, affirms that, for Wesley, “Doctrine was not an end in itself. Rather, he saw doctrine as a means to keep Christians grounded in truth and

⁵² Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 258.

bonded in love.”⁵³ It is important to remember that Wesley understood the Methodist movement to be a force of renewal within the established Church of England; therefore, Methodism did not create or espouse any “new doctrines” but simply reclaimed the historic doctrines of the Christian faith already affirmed, but largely forgotten and neglected by the church in his time. Methodism reframed historic, biblical, primitive Christianity in a way that was accessible and understandable to the common person. The Methodist approach to Christian doctrine bore witness to Wesley’s generous orthodoxy and “Catholic Spirit.”

In his sermon “Catholic Spirit,” Wesley described this generous orthodoxy towards differing religious practice and belief as a heart filled with love of God and love of neighbor.⁵⁴ This generous orthodoxy is further explained in Wesley’s essay “The Character of a Methodist:”

The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or of another, are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever, therefore, imagines that a Methodist is a man of such or such an opinion, is grossly ignorant of the whole affair; he mistakes the truth totally. We believe, indeed, that “all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God;” and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels. We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish Church. We believe Christ to be the eternal, supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think. So that whatsoever they are, whether right or wrong, they are no distinguishing marks of a Methodist.⁵⁵

⁵³ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 15.

⁵⁴ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 5, 503.

⁵⁵ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 8, 340.

Methodist historian, Kevin Watson summarizes the broad tenants of Methodist doctrine as, “All need to be saved. All can be saved. All can know they are saved. All can be saved to the uttermost.”⁵⁶ The Doctrinal Standards of the United Methodist Church affirm these beliefs.

It is important to note that from the beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church, disagreements existed concerning how Wesley’s *Sermons, Notes*, and other writings explaining these basic tenants were to function as doctrinal norms and standards for the church. Historian Frank Baker examines John Wesley’s influence, role, and power in the development of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s doctrine and discipline in his article “The Doctrines in the *Discipline*.” Baker makes a compelling argument that after the Christmas Conference of 1784, and even more so after Wesley’s death, Wesley’s theological influence diminished in Europe and to an even greater extent in the American church. His teaching was enshrined in official doctrinal statements, but the spirit of his doctrine faded with each passing year.⁵⁷ In 1986, leading Methodist historians Thomas Oden and Richard Heitzenrater wrote two important essays that reflected the differing opinions present in the United Methodist Church in regards to our Doctrinal Standards.

What was the spirit of the Methodist movement and doctrine? Watson, believes the spirit of Wesley’s doctrine was simply, “holiness of heart and life.”⁵⁸ From looking

⁵⁶ Watson and Kisker, *The Band Meeting*, 66.

⁵⁷ Frank Baker, "Doctrines in the Discipline: A Study of the Forgotten Theological Presuppositions of American Methodism," *Duke Divinity School Review* 31, no. 1 (1966): 39-55, accessed May 2, 2018, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁵⁸ Kevin Watson, “John Wesley’s Thoughts Upon Methodism (Part II),” *Vital Piety*, June 27, 2007, accessed May 3, 2018, <https://vitalpiety.com/2007/06/27/john-wesleys-thoughts-upon-methodism-part-ii>.

at Wesley's search for the spiritual assurance, it is likely the spirit of Methodism was also a quest for an awakening of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Christian believer. After his mishap in Georgia, it is clear that Wesley was searching for the fulfillment of the promise of Romans 8. After he discovered the assurance of faith by the witness of the Holy Spirit, he wanted others to experience it as well. The spirit of Methodism was spiritual transformation and renewal of individuals, the church, and society by the power of the Holy Spirit. The discipline and structure of the Methodist movement created the environment for this transformation to take place. In "Thoughts Upon Methodism," Wesley noted the transformational power of doctrine, when guided by the spirit:

From this short sketch of Methodism, (so called,) any man of understanding may easily discern, that it is only plain, scriptural religion, guarded by a few prudential regulations. The essence of it is holiness of heart and life; the circumstantial all point to this. And as long as they are joined together in the people called Methodists, no weapon formed against them shall prosper.⁵⁹

The Discipline of Early Methodism

A quest for holiness was the driving spirit of the early Methodist movement. Kevin Watson notes, "The band meeting was the engine of holiness in early Methodism."⁶⁰ Wesley knew that growth in holiness and faith comes through self-awareness and disclosure. Wesley experienced this as a child, for his mother made it regular practice to ask her children about the spiritual state of their hearts. The Oxford Holy Club was the first formal expression of the Methodist band. The band and class

⁵⁹ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 260.

⁶⁰ Watson and Kisker, *The Band Meeting*, 86.

system would be further developed after Wesley met Peter Böhler and visited the Moravians in Herrnhut.

Methodist Societies were an organized collection of class meetings. The only requirement for joining a class meeting was, “A desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins” and to commit to attending weekly meetings with others with the same spiritual desire.⁶¹ Class meetings were led by laity and included time of teaching, worship, sharing, and prayer. In the class meeting, members were asked “How is it with your soul?” The members of the classes were guided by The General Rules:

1. Do no harm. 2. Stay in love with God. 3. Attend unto the ordinances of God. The General Rules are still part of the United Methodist Church’s *Book of Discipline*.

Band meetings were a smaller and more serious group of Methodists even than the classes. Bands were small groups of devout believers divided by gender. Bands were converted Christians who were seeking the witness of the Spirit and sought holiness in heart and life.⁶² Each member of a class and band would answer the following questions at each meeting:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?⁶³

Watson argues that the class and band meetings do two important things in the church and in the life of the Christian disciple. First, the class meeting joins Christians in a

⁶¹ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 69.

⁶² Watson and Kisker, *The Band Meeting*, 92.

⁶³ Watson and Kisker, *The Band Meeting*, 85.

network of relationships that prevent them from being lost or disconnected in the church. Second, the nature of the class and band meetings reminds disciples that the Christian life is meant to foster continued growth and maturity.⁶⁴

By the mid-nineteenth century the discipline of the class and band meetings were gone and had been largely replaced by the modern conception of the Sunday School class. In America, the location of pastors and the establishment of local congregations made clergy more accessible to the laity, so there was no perceived need for class leaders to see to the spiritual needs of the classes and bands in their community.⁶⁵ In Britain, the class and band system operated longer into the nineteenth century; however, Watson believes the upward mobility of the British Methodists made it less attractive to be held spiritually accountable by your peers.⁶⁶ Wesley feared wealth and the love of money would kill the spirit of the Methodist and it is proper that these words conclude his essay “Thoughts Upon Methodism:”

It nearly concerns us to understand how the case stands with us at present. I fear, wherever riches have increased, (exceeding few are the exceptions,) the essence of religion, the mind that was in Christ, has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore do I not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality; and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches.

How, then, is it possible that Methodism, that is, the religion of the heart, though it nourishes now as a green bay-tree, should continue in this state? For the Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal; consequently, they increase in goods. Hence they proportionably increase in pride, in anger, in the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life. So, although the form of religion remains, the spirit is swiftly vanishing away.

⁶⁴ Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2014), 61-62.

⁶⁵ Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 70.

⁶⁶ Kevin M. Watson, interview by author, May 2, 2018.

Is there no way to prevent this? this continual declension of pure religion? We ought not to forbid people to be diligent and frugal: We must exhort all Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow rich! What way, then, (I ask again,) can we take, that our money may not sink us to the nethermost hell? There is one way, and there is no other under heaven. If those who “gain all they can,” and “save all they can,” will likewise “give all they can;” then, the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace, and the more treasure they will lay up in heaven.⁶⁷

Concluding Thoughts

Sadly, when the state of the United Methodist Church is examined, particularly in America and Europe, all that can be observed is an organization, not a movement. From the recent reports of the Council of Bishops and the Commission on a Way Forward, the United Methodist Church suffers from the “dangers of riches” which so concerned John Wesley. The church is more concerned about preservation of the institution instead of transformation of the soul. Wesley’s fears expressed in “Thoughts Upon Methodism” have become reality.

This historical examination of “Thoughts Upon Methodism” reveals Wesley’s fears were in fact becoming reality during his lifetime, for he saw the changes in the hearts and practice of his beloved Methodists. The actions of the Methodist Church in America, in particular their limiting Wesley’s control on their church and failure to standardize the doctrinal role of Wesley’s teachings, are the most significant examples of early expressions of Methodism ceasing to be a movement. The slow decline of the class and band systems and the rise of Sunday Schools also mark the quenching of the spirit that fueled the early Methodists. This issue will require further study, but the death of

⁶⁷ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 260-261.

John Fletcher and the failure of Wesley to find an equal to take leadership of Methodism likely sped up the movement's transformation into an established church.

This historical study of "Thoughts Upon Methodism" also reveals three important best practices that can impact the work of spiritual transformation in the local church. First, Wesley's spiritual autobiography reveals the importance of clergy and ministry leaders to have the witness of assurance. Before Aldersgate, Wesley only had the "form of godliness." After Aldersgate, Wesley discovered and operated in the power of godliness. This leads to the conclusion that spiritual leaders need to first make sure of the witness of assurance in their own hearts, and then make sure the leaders and people in their care also know that they are saved. Second, the death of John Fletcher reminds us of the importance of equipping and empowering leaders to continue in the work when the leader in place transitions out of leadership, position, or influence. Further research on this topic is necessary, but it appears that Wesley did not do a good job of equipping the next generation of leaders to continue his work. There was no shortage of written work detailing Wesley's thoughts and opinions, but the passion, heart, and spirit of the movement were not fully passed onto the next generation of leaders. Lastly, this study reveals the importance of holding other believers accountable in love. Methodism needs to reclaim its lost heritage of the class and band meetings. Thankfully the work of Kevin Watson and others is helping the Methodism reclaim its tradition. Perhaps the class and band system could not only help transform Sunday schools, but also ministry and staff leadership meetings. If ministry leaders and church staff were in accountable relationships that made sure they were growing as disciples of Jesus Christ who knows

what God could do. Such accountable relationships could birth another rise of Methodism that would spread “Scriptural holiness across the land.”

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The congregation of Greensboro First United Methodist Church represents a diversity of theological backgrounds and religious experiences. Greensboro First might be a United Methodist congregation, but if people listen carefully to the conversations taking place among the congregation they will likely hear Baptist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and even possibly non-Christian theological ideas shared along with Wesleyan and United Methodist beliefs. The ministry staff of the church represents a variety of theological traditions including Church of Christ, Lutheran, Baptist, and non-denominational. Greensboro First's diversity of theological backgrounds and religious experience offers a challenge and opportunity for discipleship development.

An effective discipleship program which encouraged participants to watch over each other in a time of change at Greensboro First needed to address this variety of theological beliefs held by the congregation. A discipleship program for the church needed to be intentional in teaching United Methodist theology. Discipleship development also needed to teach United Methodism's Wesleyan theological foundations in order to help the church stay committed to the doctrine, discipline, and spirit of the Methodist movement.

One might be concerned about whether a discipleship program can respect the wide variety of theological beliefs that a congregation might hold, while also teaching the theology of a specific denomination. This chapter will argue that it is possible, if the goal of a discipleship program is the formation of Christians and not adherents of a specific doctrine, denomination, or theological movement. Wesleyan theology and its subsequent United Methodist doctrines give room for a generous Christian orthodoxy. United Methodist theology embraces a broad theological expression of Christian faith and teaching. Therefore, developing a discipleship program that embraces United Methodist theology and its Wesleyan foundations will enable Greensboro First, even with a theologically diverse congregation, to effectively make effective disciples of Jesus Christ.

This chapter will examine the Wesleyan theological foundations that were important to designing a discipleship program at Greensboro First, beginning with a consideration of the ecumenical spirit of John Wesley's theology and its influence on contemporary United Methodist theology. Next, Wesley's concept of grace will be presented, followed by a review of his understanding of salvation. The scriptural foundations and influence on Wesley's approach to discipleship will be presented. This presentation will lead to an exploration of Christian life in the Wesleyan tradition and the role of the Means of Grace. In conclusion, the chapter will offer a consideration of how these features of United Methodist and Wesleyan theology serve as critical components of a discipleship program at Greensboro First United Methodist Church.

Wesley's Ecumenical Spirit

Among the theological teachings of its founder, United Methodist theology embraces Wesley's ecumenical spirit. John Wesley was able to work in ministry with Christians who held theological ideas different from his own, yet, Wesley's ecumenical spirit was not always reciprocated. Wesley often found himself excluded by leaders in the established Church of England. For example, he began open air preaching in Bristol because most of the pulpits in London had been closed to him.¹

John Wesley understood Methodism to be a contemporary expression of the biblical Christianity that was lived out in the witness of the early church. He sought to recapture "the religion of the primitive church, of the whole church in the purest ages,"² and described his, and the Methodist's, theological openness in, "The Character of a Methodist," where he writes, "But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think."³ The primitive church was, in his opinion, far more united than the fractured body of Christ that he knew, and that exists today with its countless denominations and movements.

United Methodism honors Wesley's commitment to ecumenicism and Christian unity. *The 2016 Book of Discipline* explains the importance of ecumenicism in a section called "Our Theological Task." *The Discipline* declares, "Christian unity is founded on

¹ Howard Snyder, "John Wesley's Start in Preaching to the Poor," *Seedbed*, August 11, 2017, accessed November 10, 2018, <https://www.seedbed.com/john-wesley-preaching-to-the-poor/>.

² J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Being United Methodist: What It Means, Why It Matters* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 5.

³ John Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist," General Board of Global Ministries, accessed November 27, 2018, <https://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/The-Wesleys-and-Their-Times/The-Character-of-a-Methodist>.

the theological understanding that through faith in Jesus Christ we are made members-in-common of the one body of Christ. Christian unity is not an option; it is a gift to be received and expressed.”⁴

As a United Methodist Church, Greensboro First is committed to ecumenicism. This commitment is not just an affirmation of a denominational statement, rather it is a vital part of the church’s ethos. The church often partners in ministry and mission with congregations and organizations from other denominations. The ecumenical spirit is also evident in the church’s willingness to hire staff from a variety of Christian denominations. A discipleship program at Greensboro First needs to honor the ecumenical spirit and ethos of the church.

John Wesley believed and taught that the root of scriptural Christianity was love of God and love of neighbor. Wesley recognized that there were a wide variety of ways Christians understood the Bible and lived out their faith, and he did not necessarily agree with the different doctrines or practices of other denominations. For him, however, if these differences did not stand in conflict with his understanding of primitive biblical Christianity, Wesley politely respected them. If differing theological practices did not hinder people from loving God and neighbor, then Wesley appreciated them with a “catholic spirit.”

The following from Wesley’s sermon, “The Catholic Spirit,” expresses the character of his cooperative spirit:

But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union; yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not

⁴ The United Methodist Church, “Our Theological Task,” *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 90.

of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.⁵

United Methodism still bears the gracious and open character of John Wesley's theology. The primitive Christian doctrine and theology John Wesley taught provides a generous orthodoxy that can be embraced by many denominations in the Christian church. But it is important to remember that Wesleyan theology and United Methodist theology, though ecumenical and gracious in spirit, should not lead to unrestrained theological pluralism. Wesleyan theology has boundaries of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Dr. Albert C. Outler, the principle theologian of twentieth century Wesleyan theology, led the Theological Study Commission which crafted the initial Theological and Doctrinal Statements of The United Methodist Church. Dr. Outler and the Commission examined John Wesley's systematic approach to theology. Outler noted that Wesley's theological method was grounded in scripture, but also guided by the tradition of the church, shaped by reason, and affirmed by Christian experience.⁶ For Outler, Wesley's catholic spirit was, "Far from being a license to doctrinal recklessness or indifferentism, the Wesleyan principle of pluralism holds in dynamic balance both the biblical focus of all Christian doctrine and also the responsible freedom that all Christians must have in their theological reflections and public teaching."⁷

⁵ John Wesley, "The Catholic Spirit," *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 493. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

⁶ Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—in John Wesley," in *Doctrine and Theology of The United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas A. Langford (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991), 76.

⁷ Albert C. Outler, "Introduction to the Report of the 1968-72 Theological Study Commission," in *Doctrine and Theology of The United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas A. Langford (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991), 21.

Rather Wesleyan pluralism embraces theological teaching and doctrine that is rooted in scripture, affirmed by the teaching tradition of the early church, is rational in thought, and can be experienced by the grace of God. Such a pluralism, though generous and gracious in doctrinal expression, retains boundaries of acceptance that come from scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

Outler describes these boundaries as, “[E]vangelical in substance (firm and clear in its Christocentric focus) and irenic in its temper (‘catholic spirit’).”⁸ Even with these boundaries, Outler saw the opportunities that Wesley’s theological method could provide contemporary Christianity. He argues, “It preserves the primacy of Scripture, it profits from the wisdom of tradition, it accepts the disciplines of critical reason, and its stress on Christian experience of grace gives it existential force.”⁹

The Wesleyan theological method aligns with the biblical foundations presented in the previous chapter. It affirms Jesus as “the way, the truth, and the life,” the way of salvation and new life in God, and the incarnate and embodied truth of scripture. Jesus models and empowers life as God intended. Thus, the Wesleyan theological method guided the design and planning of the discipleship program for Greensboro First.

Wesley’s theological pluralism influenced the cultural and ethnic diversity of the early Methodist movement. The first Methodists welcomed a variety of social classes and ethnic groups. For example, the first Methodists at Oxford ministered to prisoners. When John Wesley went to Georgia, he was a missionary to the native Americans there. Upon

⁸ Outler, “The Wesleyan Quarilateral,” 78.

⁹ Outler, “The Wesleyan Quarilateral,” 78.

his return from Georgia he attended Bible studies with German Moravians.¹⁰ The Christian life in the Methodist theological tradition would bear witness to their openness by the following:

A Methodist is one who has “the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;” one who “loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.” God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever!”¹¹

A discipleship program at Greensboro First had also to embrace a diversity of people. The congregation of Greensboro First includes a mix of economic and social diversity. The church membership spans the very wealthy through the very poor. Church members include educated professionals and people who did not complete high school. The congregation is mostly white in its race, but the church’s community is racially diverse. If the discipleship program intended to be evangelistic in its nature, then it needed to create an environment and culture that is welcome and open to racial diversity. Discipleship that is not open to racial diversity is not true to the spirit of primitive Christianity. Racial exclusivism is not a characteristic of Wesleyan theology. United Methodism is committed to racial and ethnic diversity in its congregations.¹² In short,

¹⁰ John Wesley, *A Short History of the People Called Methodists* (London: J. Paramore, printer, [1781]). This work provides a summary of Wesley’s ministry with people of various cultural and ethnic groups.

¹¹ Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist.”

¹² For details of the United Methodist commitment to diversity see: The People of the United Methodist Church, “The Social Community” *Social Principles and Social Creed*, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://ee.umc.org/what-we-believe/social-principles-social-creed>.

Greensboro First's discipleship program needed to provide a place for all people to experience the grace of God.

A Wesleyan Theology of Grace

John Wesley's catholic spirit reflects his theology of grace. Grace was, and continues to be, a defining characteristic of the Wesleyan movement and United Methodist theology. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines grace as, "the supernatural assistance of God bestowed upon a rational being with a view to his sanctification."¹³ *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* defines grace as, "God's uncoerced initiative and pervasive, extravagant demonstrations of care and favor for all."¹⁴ The Doctrinal Standards of The United Methodist Church defines grace as, "The undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. While the grace of God is undivided, it precedes salvation as "prevenient grace," continues in "justifying grace," and is brought to fruition in "sanctifying grace."¹⁵

Grace is the love and power of God present and alive in our hearts. Humanity does not deserve grace. Nonetheless, God sheds grace abroad into the hearts of all people.

¹³ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 700, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

¹⁴ J. B. Green, "Grace," *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 527, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

¹⁵ The United Methodist Church, "Our Theological Task," 51-52.

It is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ through which sinful humanity experiences forgiveness of sin.¹⁶ Grace provides and sustains the Christian believer's life.

The Wesleyan understanding of grace shapes its theology. Grace shapes John Wesley's understanding of the way of salvation in Christ Jesus. Andrew Thompson, a contemporary Wesleyan theologian and scholar, contends John Wesley considered grace to be, "the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us to help us grow spiritually."¹⁷ Thompson characterizes grace in the Wesleyan tradition as unconditional, transformational, and invitational in nature.¹⁸ Grace is freely offered to all people. Grace has the power to transform every heart. Grace is the means by which God offers everyone an invitation to share in and join God's continued work of saving the world.¹⁹ The threefold nature of grace is laid out in the Wesleyan order of salvation as prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying.

The Wesleyan Order of Salvation

The Wesleyan doctrine of salvation reflects the universality and fullness of God's grace by affirming that all need to be saved, all can be saved, all can know they are saved, and all can be saved to the uttermost.²⁰ This understanding of salvation embraces the prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying nature of God's grace. Wesleyan theologian

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:8-9.

¹⁷ Andrew Thompson, *The Means of Grace: Traditional Practice in Today's World* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2015), 6.

¹⁸ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 10.

¹⁹ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 10.

²⁰ Kevin M. Watson and Scott T. Kisker, *The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017), 66.

Kevin Watson offers this summary of the role of grace along every step of way of salvation: “We come to an awareness of our need for God by grace. We are forgiven and made new by grace. And we are enabled to participate in our salvation by grace.”²¹

The Wesleyan understanding of salvation affirms that God’s grace is at work in the world and whole human condition. Thomas Oden contends that Wesley recognized the power of common grace. Oden notes, “Common grace bestows upon fallen man the conditions for experience some preliminary knowledge of God and his attributes.”²² It is common grace that enables humanity to be aware of God. It is the prevenient nature of grace that enables all humanity to become particularly aware of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Wesley’s doctrine of prevenient grace affirms that God’s grace is available to all people. His doctrine of the atonement is universal in nature, for Christ’s death and resurrection offer forgiveness of sin for all people. Wesley took seriously Jesus’s words in John 3:16 and believed that Jesus died on the cross to save the world, the entire world. Wesley’s doctrine of prevenient grace being available to all people was, as he understood it, a continuation of the theology of the New Testament Church.²³

It is important to note, however, that Wesley’s belief in Christ’s universal atonement is not to be confused with universalism. Wesley always contended that forgiveness of sin is found in Jesus Christ alone. Oden summarizes Wesley’s view as:

²¹ Kevin M. Watson, *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley’s General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2009), 20-21.

²² Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 251.

²³ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1967), 23.

“The common and prevenient grace working in other religions is understood not as something other than the grace of the One who meets us in the Incarnation, the same triune One working preveniently.”²⁴ The truth of God might be present in other non-Christian religions, but the fullness of God’s grace can only be experienced through Jesus Christ.

Wesley’s doctrine of prevenient grace promises that the justifying power of grace can be experienced by everyone. Prevenient grace guides a person to a point of decision. Their decision will be an act of faith. A person will have faith in Jesus Christ or no faith in Christ. For Wesley, justifying grace enabled those who placed their faith in Christ to experience a new birth.²⁵

Justifying grace gives the Christian believer a spiritual new birth. The new birth also realigns and reorients the life of a believer on the way of holiness of heart and life.²⁶ When the power of justifying grace transforms the heart of a Christian, the believer will have an assurance or witness of this work.²⁷ John Wesley’s assurance of God’s justifying grace happened on May 24, 1738. Wesley described the witness of God’s forgiving grace in this journal entry: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”²⁸

²⁴ “On Grace and Predestination,” 250.

²⁵ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 12.

²⁶ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 12.

²⁷ Romans 8:16

²⁸ John Wesley, *The Heart of John Wesley’s Journal*, ed. Percy Livingstone Parker (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903), 43. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

There is disagreement among Wesleyan historians if May 24, 1738, was John Wesley's Christian conversion or his experience of sanctification. What is clear is from May 24, 1738 forward, Wesley's life bears witness to a new orientation and direction. Steve Manskar, former director of Wesleyan Leadership at Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church, describes Wesley's Aldersgate experience in the following terms:

Wesley's experience that night was a conversion. He experienced a "conversion" in thinking and understanding about the nature of grace and salvation. That night Wesley realized that forgiveness of sins and acceptance by God (justification) is a free gift. Nothing we can do will ever make us worthy or acceptable. God did the work of atonement on the cross in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.²⁹

The justifying power of God's forgiving grace enables a person to begin the process of growing into full maturity as a Christian believer. Justifying grace restores the believer into right standing and relationship with God through the forgiveness of sin.³⁰ Sanctifying grace enables a person to begin being made holy as God is holy.³¹ Justifying grace breaks the guilt of sin and cancels its reign over a person's life.³² Sanctifying grace empowers the Christian believer to keep sin from trying to regain its power and rule.³³

Wesley believed justification and sanctification are an instantaneous work of grace; however, sanctification is also an ongoing and never-ending work of grace.³⁴ The

²⁹ Steve Manskar, "Aldersgate," *Equipping Disciples: A Discipleship Ministries*, Blog May 23, 2017, accessed Nov 10, 2018. <https://blog.umcdiscipleship.org/aldersgate/>.

³⁰ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 12.

³¹ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 13.

³² Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2014).45.

³³ Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 50.

³⁴ Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1980), 123.

end goal of sanctification is to be perfected in love. Sanctifying grace guides the Christian in holy living like Christ. Sanctifying grace empowers the transformation along the way. Kevin Watson offers this contemporary definition of sanctification, “[It] means giving all that I know of myself to all that I know of God.”³⁵

John Wesley considered sanctifying grace and its call to holy living to be the “grand despositum” for which God had raised the Methodist movement.³⁶ The mission of the Methodist movement was “to spread scriptural holiness across the land.”³⁷ This holiness, however, was not just to be an inward work of grace, it was also to be an outward and visible way of new life.³⁸ This sanctified and holy life is to be a life lived in community. Wesley stressed the social nature of holiness with this charge from the Preface to the 1739 collection of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. ‘Faith working by love’ is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.”³⁹

This emphasis on the communal nature of the holy life is likely the reason John Wesley and the early Methodists organized people into discipleship groups. Methodists who were seeking holiness and Christian perfection were expected to be active members

³⁵ Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 48.

³⁶ John Wesley, “‘DCLXXVIII’ in ‘Letters from the Reverend John Wesley to Various Persons,’ in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 13 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 9. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

³⁷ John Wesley, “Minutes of Several Conversations Between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 8 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 299. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

³⁸ John Wesley, “‘CGLXVI’ in Letters from the Reverend John Wesley to Various Persons,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 12 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 297. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

³⁹ John Wesley, “Hymns and Sacred Poems,” *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 14 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 321. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

of a society and class meeting.⁴⁰ Methodists were not expected to work out their salvation all alone. Christians need a supportive community of fellow believers to watch over them in love.

The Wesleyan Way of Salvation provides a helpful foundation upon which to build a discipleship program at Greensboro First. God's saving grace is available to all people. Therefore, there is no substantial theological reason to try to exclude anyone from participating in a discipleship program. All people can know that they are saved, which means this discipleship program has the potential for participants to experience the assurance of justifying grace. Justified believers should continue to grow in grace. Justified believers should continue seeking to be perfected in love. This discipleship program at Greensboro First can provide an environment for believers to experience the continuing work of sanctifying grace in their lives.

Wesleyan Salvation in Community

Though salvation is an individual matter, the Christian life is intended to be lived in community. The Christian life is shaped by love and the nature of love is expressed by sharing it with others. Since its beginning, preaching and worship were common features of the Methodist societies. However, the heart of Methodism was the class and band meetings in which Methodists gathered for spiritual formation and accountability.

Wesley designed the class and band meetings as a means to ensure that an embrace of Christianity was not just an assent to belief and doctrine, but was witnessed to

⁴⁰ John Wesley and Charles Wesley, "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies, in London, Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, &c.," *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 8 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 269. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

by a transformed way of life.⁴¹ The society, class, and band meetings reflected the Wesleyan way of salvation. The society was a means of common or prevenient grace. The class meetings provided a means for people to experience the justifying and sanctifying power of grace. The band meeting challenged the justified Christian to grow in sanctifying grace. The band meeting was the covenant community for Christians wholeheartedly seeking Jesus Christ, to walk in his way, to know his truth, and to live life as he intends.

The Historical Foundations Chapter briefly touched upon the structure and discipline of the class and band meeting. In these small covenant groups, Methodists grew in their experience of the love of God, and they shared the successes and failures of their spiritual life. The class and band meeting were places of confession and accountability, providing a place where its members could examine the spiritual state of their soul. The class and band meeting encouraged Methodists to experience the fullness of the Christian life through a life of discipleship.

The *Lexham Cultural Ontology Glossary* defines discipleship as “the process of training people incrementally in some discipline or way of life.”⁴² Christian discipleship is the formation of people in the way of Jesus Christ. When connected to the themes of the Biblical foundations for this project, discipleship is the work of helping people know Christ as the Lord and Savior. Discipleship helps people discover Jesus’s way, to know his truth, and to live the transformed life that he modeled. When connected with other believers, discipleship helps them to be faithful to Christ’s “way, his truth, and his life.”

⁴¹ Watson, *A Blueprint for Discipleship*, 11.

⁴² David Witthoff, ed., *The Lexham Cultural Ontology Glossary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos Bible Software 7.14.

John Wesley's understanding of discipleship reflects a biblical model of Jesus' ministry. The path of discipleship began with Jesus' invitation to, "come and follow me."⁴³ The response to Jesus' invitation was voluntary, and rested with the hearer.⁴⁴ Jesus alone issued the invitation to come and follow him, but he did not demand that anyone must follow him. In early Methodism, the invitation to be part of a society was broad and voluntary. People wanting to be part of a Methodist society had to show, "A desire 'to flee from the wrath to come,' to be saved from their sins:"⁴⁵ Membership was not demanded. The invitation into the Methodist process of discipleship formation followed the biblical example of Christ; it was gracious and voluntary. Again, the society models the Wesleyan conception of prevenient grace. The invitation to become part of a Methodist Society was freely offered to all, but a response was never forced.

When a person decided to follow Jesus on the path of discipleship, he or she began a journey into a new way of life.⁴⁶ As disciples followed Jesus, they found themselves living differently. Following Jesus brought about a transformation in the behavior and moral character of a disciple.⁴⁷ Methodists who responded to the invitation

⁴³ Mark 1:17, Matthew 4:19, and Luke 5:10-11 are examples of Jesus inviting people to follow him.

⁴⁴ M. J. Wilkins, "Discipleship," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 187, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

⁴⁵ John Wesley and Charles Wesley, "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies," 270.

⁴⁶ Wilkins, "Discipleship," 187.

⁴⁷ In Luke 9:23-25 Jesus describes this change of life as a denial of the old way of living.

to enter into the Wesleyan discipleship process were also expected to start living a new way of life.

Members of Methodist societies were required to be part of a class meeting or covenant group. Members of Methodist class meetings were expected to live by the General Rules of “Doing no harm, Doing Good, and attending unto the Ordinances of God.”⁴⁸ It was expected that if Methodists were walking along the way of Jesus, then their lives would show a departure from sinfulness. Methodists walking along the way of Jesus were to be intentional about doing good, to model a Christ-like life, and they were also expected and encouraged to be intentional about abiding in and strengthening their love for Christ. Again, this reflects the Wesleyan conception of justifying and sanctifying grace.

The means of grace serve as spiritual practices that enable people to experience God’s love and power at work in their lives. For Wesley there were three main categories of the means of grace, instituted, prudential, and general. Instituted means of grace are spiritual disciplines we learn from the life and ministry of Christ. The instituted means of grace include baptism, reading and studying scripture, prayer, Holy Communion, fasting, and Christian fellowship. Prudential means of grace come from the context in which one finds oneself living.⁴⁹ For John Wesley among the prudential means of grace were the covenant group meetings that were vital parts of Methodism, the General Rules of Methodist societies, and acts of mercy.⁵⁰ The general means of grace are the spiritual

⁴⁸ John Wesley and Charles Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” 270. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 18.

⁵⁰ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 102.

foundation from which the instituted and prudential means receive their transformative power.⁵¹

Thompson, contends that practicing the general means of grace simply reflects the intention of the heart. Using the general means of grace answers a sincere yearning in the heart to know and love God. He draws attention to Wesley's description of the Christian life as "holiness of heart and life" arguing that Wesley is making a significant statement with this phrase. Thompson writes,

One of Wesley's favored phrases to describe the true meaning of the Christian life is that it is expressed through "holiness of heart and life." And get this: he never, ever reverses the order of those two. It is always holiness of heart and life and never holiness of life and heart. The reason is that he believes the inner nature of the heart will always end up ruling the outer actions of life.⁵²

If it is to follow the Wesleyan path, a discipleship program at Greensboro First needs to focus on helping individuals and communities of believers experience the grace of God in their lives. The program should offer a clear explanation of the ways one can experience the prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying work of grace. It would also be helpful for the discipleship program to explain the means of grace and have opportunities for them to be practiced by individuals and in covenant community. However, the most formational thing the discipleship program could do is to help participants become aware of the intent and direction of their hearts. The program needs to encourage participants to seek God with all their heart, mind, and soul which will enable them to live a graceful Christian life.

⁵¹ Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 128.

⁵² Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, 127-128.

Biblical Categories of Discipleship in Methodism's Structure

In the gospels, there are different general categories of the people who follow Jesus. The largest category was the crowd. Jesus' preaching and teaching ministry drew large crowds of people, such as when legions of people came to see Jesus when he performed miracles. The miracle of the loaves and fishes involved over 5,000 people.⁵³ The crowds included people who were not interested in becoming followers of Jesus. For example, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who often challenged Jesus's interpretation of the Jewish law and religious tradition, were part of the crowds who came to witness Jesus's ministry.⁵⁴

Jesus also had followers who were part of his ministry. The scripture describes these people as supportive of Jesus's ministry.⁵⁵ However, these people were not in a committed relationship with the Savior like the one Jesus had with the twelve disciples.⁵⁶ The twelve are intentionally mentored and taught by Jesus. There was also an inner circle among the twelve disciples. For example, Jesus appears to have a more intimate teacher and student relationship with Peter, James, and John.⁵⁷ The different levels of relational intention, intimacy, and interaction within the crowds, followers, and disciples are modeled in the different classifications of the Methodist society, classes, and bands.

The Methodists societies, classes, and bands appear to follow the classification of followers and disciples that appear in the ministry of Jesus. The open air and public

⁵³ Matthew 14:13-21.

⁵⁴ Matthew 12:1-14.

⁵⁵ Acts 1:21-26.

⁵⁶ Matthew 4:18-21.

⁵⁷ Matthew 17:1-13 and Matthew 26:36-46.

preaching drew all types of people to hear John Wesley and other Methodist preachers. Some of the people in these large crowds were interested in what was being proclaimed. Perhaps open-air preaching was an example of God's common grace at work in all the world, even outside of traditional Christian structures. Some of the people in these large crowds were like the Pharisees and Sadducees in the Bible. These people challenged the teaching and preaching of Methodism.⁵⁸ The Methodist Society included Christian believers as well as those who had not experienced a spiritual new birth by justifying grace. Society members who experienced spiritual justification were expected to be active members of a class meeting. The class meeting included those who were going on toward perfection in love. Class members were encouraged but not required to be a member of a gender defined band meeting. The Band meeting was designed to encourage Methodists who were seeking perfection in love.

The Select society was the uppermost group in the early Methodist hierarchy.⁵⁹ John Wesley personally selected the members this group for their character, leadership, and faithfulness to the Methodist movement.⁶⁰ The select society provided a safe place for leaders to more intensely pursue perfection in love. John Wesley used the select society as the covenantal community to hold him spiritually accountable.⁶¹ In his, *A*

⁵⁸ Wesley's "A Short History of the People Called Methodist" included several examples of the challenges and criticisms the movement experienced.

⁵⁹ D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), 121.

⁶⁰ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 121.

⁶¹ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 124.

Model for Making Disciples, D. Michael Henderson notes that the select society was also intended to serve as a model and goal for all the levels of the Methodist Movement.

The inner dynamics of this association were to be a model of how all the modes of Methodism should function: open, honest, committed to each other, caring, and concerned for each other's welfare. Not only were they to be models to "all their brethren as a pattern of love, of holiness, and good works," but the quality of their group experience should provide a standard of excellence for all the other groups within the system.⁶²

Methodist Societies provided space, structure, teaching, and guidance for individuals at every stage of the way of salvation. A discipleship program that utilizes this strength of the Methodist Societies would likely provide a safe place for the non-Christian, a new follower of Christ, and sanctified saints among us to experience God's grace and transformation at Greensboro First. This program can also provide a safe place for leaders to experience God's grace and to grow in their Christian maturity. And finally, this program could also provide a place of safety and comfort in a time of uncertainty and change.

Conclusion

The contents of this chapter provided a theological foundation for a discipleship program modeled in the tradition of the early Methodist society, class, and band meetings. Wesleyan and United Methodist theology provide the gracious and ecumenical spirit needed at Greensboro First. The congregation and leadership of the church come from a variety of theological and denominational backgrounds. A theology that was not ecumenical and catholic in spirit would likely become problematic with people who

⁶² Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 123.

disagreed on a matter. However, it was important that the theology of the discipleship program stayed within the bounds of orthodoxy. So, it was necessary for the foundational beliefs of primitive Christianity to be laid out and explained.

Wesleyan theology is grounded in grace. Grace is needed in every church, community, and life. A discipleship program at Greensboro First also needed to be grounded in grace. The program asked participants to define grace. It then helped participants expand their definition and knowledge of grace so they would become aware of its prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying power. Because of the denominational diversity at Greensboro First, particular attention was paid to the sanctifying work of grace. The teaching on grace also included an explanation of the Wesleyan way of salvation. A discipleship program organized in the Wesleyan way was intended to empower participants to experience the fullness of God's grace in their Christian life. Grace will provide help in times of uncertainty and change.

Lastly, Greensboro First needed smaller groups of accountable covenant community where participants could experience and grow in the love and grace of God. Greensboro First has Sunday school classes and Bible studies, but the church lacks an established and coordinated network of discipleship groups. It would be beneficial if hierarchy of the early Methodist society could be replicated in the church. However, forming such a structure will take time and commitment of leaders and participants. It was hoped that the principles of the class meeting could help transform established Sunday school classes. It is also possible that forming band meetings could become the priority of a discipleship program at Greensboro First. A band style meeting could

provide a much-needed place for the congregation, church leaders, ministry staff, and clergy to continuing growing in grace and become holy in heart and life.

It is important to note some of the challenges to this discipleship program were a pledge of trust, the commitment of time, assurance of honesty, and promise of confidentiality. Discipleship is an act of faith. Faith is an expression of trust. Trust is the glue that holds people together. Trust develops over time, so discipleship will take time. For people to experience grace together and grow their trust in each other, they must spend time together in community. Participation in this program had to be a priority above other demands on their time. For people to experience grace together there needed to be a level of honesty expected. Any falsehood or deception would undermine the trust of the group. It is difficult for spiritual transformation to happen in a community that lacks trust. A lack of trust can also create uncertainty.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to a discipleship program in the Wesley theological tradition, is participants becoming so spiritually connected and inwardly focused that they forget the missional component of grace. Covenant groups could become inward focused. Grace is meant to be shared with all people. Disciples of Jesus are not just to sit at the feet of Jesus but are also to bring others to Jesus. Discipleship formation is a means of inviting people to join and participate in bringing the will of God and God's kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. Discipleship invites people to discover Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life."

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Greensboro First United Methodist Church's mission is "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Discipleship is the work which arises from spiritual transformation. The church, which has two campuses, is continuing to discover how to provide the best spiritual formation ministry programs that help form disciples in a multi-site ministry context. Having two campuses has made it difficult to provide an intentional and organized discipleship ministry that transcends campus location. Like many churches, Greensboro First offers Christian education programs for children, youth, and adults. Currently, these program ministries are not aligned or systematic. There is little intentionality to what subjects are taught. The programs often lack learning expectations and hoped for outcomes. Therefore, it is complicated to determine and measure the effectiveness of these ministry programs concerning the discipleship formation of their participants. The lack of a systematic discipleship program is hindering the church from making mature disciples of Jesus Christ. It is also possible that the lack of intentional discipleship formation is impacting the development of leaders who are also disciple makers.

In Wesleyan theology, spiritual transformation is often described as a change of the heart. Christian conversion can also describe the transformation of the soul. The

historical and theological foundation chapters explored how participants in the Methodist societies, class, and band meetings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were asked about the condition of their soul.¹ Methodists who had been spiritually converted and transformed by God's grace were expected to exhibit transformation in their behavior. They were also expected to continue to grow in grace as they worked toward being perfected in love of God and neighbor.² In other words, transformation was an ongoing spiritual experience for Methodists. As Methodists grew in grace, it was expected that their hearts or emotions would also be impacted, their minds and ways of thinking should change.

This interdisciplinary chapter will expand the focus on the spiritual transformation of a Christian disciple's heart to include the head. It will consider how psychology can inform the discipleship formation process in a covenant group community. Psychology is a broad field of study, but this chapter will focus on Cognitive Behavior Therapy. Presentation of the interdisciplinary content will begin with an explanation of why Cognitive Behavior Therapy is an appropriate connecting discipline for this project. This presentation will also examine why Truth Therapy is an appropriate theory that connects the thesis of this project with Cognitive Behavior Therapy. After the interdisciplinary connection is established, the biblical, theological, and historical foundations connection to Truth Therapy will be examined. The interdisciplinary study will include relevant

¹ Keith Beasley-Topliffe, ed., "Covenant Groups," *The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2013), 70-71.

² David Werner, "John Wesley's Question: 'How is Your Doing?'" *The Asbury Journal* 65, no. 2 (2010): 72, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol65/iss2/7/>.

scientific discoveries, ideas, and theories that offer new perspectives in order to analyze the foundations that have already been presented in previous chapters.

Early British and American Methodism was a religion of warmed heart and transformed minds. Rev. Adam Hamilton, a leading United Methodist pastor and author, describes early Methodism as a faith that united heart and mind. Hamilton contends that contemporary United Methodism needs to reunite the spiritual connection between the heart and mind. The heart refers to the emotions of faith. In a heart-centered context God's grace is experienced, spiritual transformation is felt and witnessed in the emotions of a Christian. The head focuses on the mind and intellect and faith formation is a process of learning. In this aspect of faith transformation comes from knowledge because a disciple of Jesus knows the truth of God.

United Methodism needs to be intentional about finding harmony and balance between head and heart. Hamilton notes, "One of the defining marks of John Wesley's own faith, and of the eighteenth-century Methodist revival, was that it involved not only the emotions but also the intellect—the head as well as the heart."³ Hamilton also remarks,

"God gave us a brain and a heart. He wants us to use both. Jesus taught us to love God with our "heart and soul" as well as our "mind and strength." This union of emotion and intellect has been a hallmark of Methodism. In America, the same folks who held religious revivals called camp meetings, started colleges and universities to educate leaders who would change the world."⁴

³ Adam Hamilton, "A Faith Uniting Head and Heart," Abingdon Press, August 5, 2014, accessed December 2, 2018, <https://www.adamhamilton.com/blog/a-faith-uniting-head-and-heart/#.XASl5y3MzOQ>.

⁴ Hamilton, "A Faith Uniting Head and Heart."

The congregation of Greensboro First includes many highly educated people. Some of these people are leaders in business, industry, education, government, and other fields. Many in the congregation are retired leaders. Even though these members of the congregation are retired, they still value and continue learning.

Though the congregation values intellect, the emotional side of Christian formation has not had the same emphasis. It is hoped that this research project can help restore the spiritual connection between head and heart. A discipleship formation program at Greensboro First should embrace these same expectations for its participants. Discipleship formation should be seen as a process of ongoing spiritual transformation and development of the head and heart. Greensboro First needs disciples and leaders who are emotionally, intellectually, and spirituality transformed by God's grace.

Recent research in Cognitive Behavior Therapy offers scientific evidence of emotional, behavioral, and physical changes that occur when one begins the process of becoming self-aware and emotionally aware. Dr. Peter Bellini, Assistant Professor in the Practice of Global Christianity and Intercultural Studies at United Theological Seminary, recently published research on the study of "Truth Therapy." Bellini defines Truth Therapy as, "A method of spiritual life-coaching and formation that utilizes Christian doctrine, the names of God, scriptural affirmation and other spiritual disciplines along with the insights of Cognitive-Behavioral Theory/Therapy to teach Christians how to overcome life's challenges and live victoriously live [sic] the Christian life."⁵ Truth

⁵ Peter Bellini, "Truth Therapy," Truth Therapy-Petey Bellini, accessed November 30, 2018, <https://pbelliniblog.wordpress.com/about/>.

Therapy can serve as an interdisciplinary link between Wesleyan discipleship formation through covenant accountability groups and the field of psychology specifically known as Cognitive Behavior Therapy.

The Relationship between Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Discipleship Formation

Cognitive Behavior Therapy is a common form of psychological treatment. The Mayo Clinic describes Cognitive Behavioral Therapy as a mental health treatment that helps a person become aware of inaccurate or negative thinking so he or she can see challenges and difficulties in life more clearly and respond to them in a practical, healthy, and productive way.⁶

Psychiatrist Aaron Beck developed Cognitive Behavior Therapy in the 1960s. While working with patients, Beck recognized many of them were having a mental dialogue with themselves in the therapy process.⁷ Beck determined the internal dialogue created a strong link between thoughts and feelings so he changed his therapy and treatment process to help his clients recognize their internal thought dialogue. Beck's goal was for his patients to quickly recognize their automatic and emotion-filled thoughts and find a healthy way to address them.⁸ In Cognitive Behavior Therapy, the role of the therapist is to work with the patient to identify the problem the patient is facing, to help

⁶ Mayo Clinic Staff, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/cognitive-behavioral-therapy/about/pac-20384610>.

⁷ Ben Martin, "In-Depth: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy," PsychCentral, accessed December 8, 2018, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/in-depth-cognitive-behavioral-therapy/>.

⁸ Courtney Ackerman, "25 Cognitive Behavior Therapy Techniques and Worksheets for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy," PositivePsychology.com, accessed December 7, 2018, <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/cbt-cognitive-behavioral-therapy-techniques-worksheets/>.

the patient engage his or her internal mental dialogue, and to develop solutions that will create a positive behavioral reaction.⁹ In other words, Cognitive Behavior Therapy is the work of thinking into a transformed way of living.

Discipleship formation in a Wesleyan covenant group is the process of seeking, discovering, and applying the truth. Discipleship is the spiritual work of experiencing a transformed way of living. This quest is guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reveals the spiritual truth of the holy scriptures.¹⁰ The Holy Spirit works through the formation process by enabling people to become aware of the truth of their spiritual condition with Jesus Christ.¹¹ The Holy Spirit provides people the opportunity and means for them to learn the truth of Christ and how to apply that truth in their life.¹² Wesleyan covenant groups are relational environments where the truth can be discovered through the work of the Holy Spirit in a shared community.¹³

A covenant group can provide a community of relationships in which non-truth, lies, false doctrine, and misguided theology that can impair spiritual transformation and faith formation can be identified. When these impairments are identified, the covenant group can address them. The covenant group can also help a person develop ways to discern the truth and apply it in daily living. For these reasons, Truth Therapy will be a helpful link between discipleship formation and psychology. Hopefully, this project will

⁹ Martin, "In-Depth: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy."

¹⁰ Randy Clark, *The Essential Guide to the Power of the Holy Spirit: God's Miraculous Gifts at Work Today* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2015), 162.

¹¹ Clark, *The Essential Guide to the Power of the Holy Spirit*, 14.

¹² Clark, *The Essential Guide to the Power of the Holy Spirit*, 157.

¹³ Mark Benjamin and J.D. Walt, *Discipleship Bands: A Practical Field Guide* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2018), 10-11.

provide supporting evidence to Dr. Bellini's research. The larger Christian community will benefit from scientific discoveries that help explain the psychological and neurological effects of spiritual transformation and formation. Such discoveries could help strengthen the witness of Christianity in a post-Christian and scientific focused world.

Truth Therapy serves as a logical connection to the biblical foundations of this project. The Farewell Discourse in John 13-17 and in particular John 14:5-7 provide the scriptural foundations for this project. In John 14:5-7 Jesus declares that he is incarnate truth of God. The text reads,

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."¹⁴

In this passage, Jesus is urging his disciples to trust him. Jesus wants his disciples to believe in him as the Son of God and savior of the world. John 14:5-7 is a call to faith in the person of Christ. Christ is the fulfillment of God's word. God's word is truth, so Jesus as the incarnate word is truth. God's truth is the way to experience life as God fully intended. The life God wants humanity to experience is not mere existence or being, but rather Christ-likeness. Life is the fullness of human experience sustained and transformed by Christ.¹⁵ Sin brings death. Christ, as the truth, brings life. Christ as the embodiment of God's truth is the means toward liberation and freedom from the bondage of sin.¹⁶

¹⁴ John 14:5-7.

¹⁵ D. H. Johnson, "Life," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 469. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

¹⁶ John 8:32.

If one considers sin a form of misdirection, then sin confuses and leads a person in the wrong direction.¹⁷ Truth sets a person in the right direction. Truth leads people to God who is the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of all life.

Dr. Bellini's Truth Therapy is founded upon the scriptural assertion of Jesus as the human embodiment of truth. Bellini also uses John 14:6 as one of many biblical foundations for his theory of Truth Therapy. For Bellini, the Truth of Christ is existential truth. He states:

Jesus Christ declared himself to be the truth, and thus somehow every "true" truth is subordinate to, encompassed by, and fulfilled in him. Surely there are truths about Jesus which are logical, empirical, and propositional, but those serve a greater purpose of Jesus' existential truth. Jesus is existential truth and specifically salvific truth. He did not come to be the truth about math or science, although as Creator, somehow all truth points back to the eternal logos. He came as the truth for sinners in need of salvation. Jesus Christ, the person, is salvation and fullness of life for all persons, and this truth is mediated through a covenantal relationship with him.¹⁸

Bellini's argument that Christ is existential truth is a critical element of Truth Therapy. Christ, like truth, is not just an idea or conception. Christ is a reality to be experienced. Bellini explains, "Truth is a person, and truth is apprehended relationally through a covenant with Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit." Truth Therapy is a means of helping people experience a personal relationship with the person of Jesus. Though framed as an individualized experience, the principles of Truth Therapy should also work in a covenant group setting. In a covenant group context, Truth Therapy would

¹⁷ 1 Peter 2:25.

¹⁸ Peter J. Bellini, *Truth Therapy: Renewing Your Mind with the Word of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 26.

merely be a form of group therapy. Such a model fits the ministry of Jesus, for Jesus ministered to individuals and to groups.¹⁹

Truth Therapy connects the spiritual truth of Christ to the psychological work of Cognitive Behavior Therapy through the doctrines of salvation, holiness, and discipleship.²⁰ Bellini expands the basic understanding of salvation beyond merely the forgiveness of sins to include healing of the “spiritual, existential, mental, emotional, volitional, physical, relational, familial, vocational, social, economic, political, ecological, and digital aspects of who we are.”²¹ Bellini defines Cognitive Behavior Therapy as “a learner-based form of therapy that teaches and coaches patients to become aware of automatic thoughts and under-the-radar, stream-of-consciousness interior monologues and self-talk.”²² These are the seven principles of truth therapy:

1. Lies will bind us.
2. The Truth will set us free.
3. We cannot control others or the circumstances around us.
4. We can control our thought-life.
5. We are transformed by renewing our minds with the word of God.
6. God balances us with grace and truth.
7. Self-Denial-Say “no” to your will and “yes” to God’s will.²³

Cognitive Behavior Therapy is the process of helping a person think his or her self into a new way of living. Salvation, holiness, and discipleship describe the spiritual transformation of a person’s behavior and way of life. Cognitive behavior techniques do

¹⁹ For example, in John 4 Jesus has personal ministry interaction with the Woman at the Well and with his disciples.

²⁰ Bellini, *Truth Therapy*, 14.

²¹ Bellini, *Truth Therapy*, 14.

²² Bellini, *Truth Therapy*, 18.

²³ Bellini, *Truth Therapy*, 41-45.

not focus on the reason for the unhealthy symptoms, but rather the focus is on the behavior or thoughts that cause the symptoms.²⁴ Therefore, Truth Therapy is a rational link between psychology and discipleship formation.

In John 14:6, Jesus tells his disciples that faith in him will lead them to the truth. The truth is a way or pattern of life. Life is salvation or holiness in Christ by God's grace. John 13-17 expands upon this teaching by explaining how the Holy Spirit will guide the disciples to the truth of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will help the disciples discern the truth of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will sustain the new life the disciples find in Christ. The Holy Spirit will empower the disciples to fulfill their commitment to continue to ministry and mission that Jesus began and will entrust to them.

One could look at the Farewell Discourse of as an example of Truth Therapy at work in discipleship formation. Jesus helps the disciples acknowledge faulty thought patterns and ideas. For example one can take a fresh look at John 14:1-7 through the lens of Truth Therapy. In this passage, Jesus tells the Disciples he will be leaving them. He assures them that they will know where to go and what to do. However, in 14:5 Thomas is quick to counter what Jesus says. "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" In the field of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Thomas's reaction could be labeled as a cognitive distortion or example of faulty thinking. In this example, Thomas is filtering. In a recent article, Courtney Ackerman describes filtering as, "the

²⁴ Glena Andrews "Standing in the Gap: Wesleyan Foundations for Pastoral Counseling," in *Pastoral Practices: A Wesleyan Paradigm*, eds. Mark A. Maddix and Diane Leclerc (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2013), 83.

way many of us can somehow ignore all of the positive and good things in our day to focus solely on the negative.”²⁵

Thomas is filtering what he heard Jesus say by focusing only on the negative information. The negative information in this dialogue is Jesus’s departure. Thomas appears to ignore the positive information that Jesus shares. Thomas does not take note that Jesus is departing so he can prepare a place for them with God. Thomas does not take note that Jesus also promises to return and take them to that place. Again, all Thomas focuses on is the negative fact that Jesus will be leaving them.

Thomas also expresses faulty thinking in John 11. In John 11 Jesus and the disciples hear of the sickness of Lazarus. Jesus tells the disciples it is time for them to go and see Lazarus. The disciples do not want to return to the region around Jerusalem where Lazarus resides. The disciples express faulty thinking by catastrophizing the situation. They tell Jesus the Jews want to stone him to death.²⁶ Catastrophizing is distorted thinking based on the expectation that the worse will happen or has happened because of a minor incident in the past.²⁷ They catastrophize the situation by assuming the worst-case scenario. The disciples' fears were based on the previous threat of stoning by the Jewish religious authorities. One could argue that their fears were legitimate, but the threat was directed toward Jesus, not them. Thomas displays faulty thinking by jumping to conclusions when he declares, " Let us also go, that we may die with him."²⁸

²⁵ Ackerman, “25 Cognitive Behavior Therapy Techniques.”

²⁶ John 14:8.

²⁷ Ackerman, “25 Cognitive Behavior Therapy Techniques.”

²⁸ John 11:16.

Thomas assumes since the Jews want to stone Jesus and because Lazarus is dead, they are going to die as well.

It is also important to note in these situations the behavior of Jesus. In John 11 and John 14, Jesus appears to be calm, reasonable and collected in his thoughts. In John 11, Jesus addresses the catastrophic faulty thinking of the disciples when he explains the full situation of Lazarus' death. Jesus uses the imagery of light and darkness to describe the truth of God.²⁹ In John 14, Jesus responds to the faulty thinking of Thomas and the disciples by offering the promise of the Holy Spirit and encouraging them to seek and follow the truth of God.³⁰

In Truth Therapy, Bellini uses the term “Stinking Thinking” to describe cognitive distortion. Bellini defines Stinking Thinking as “distorted, irrational, self-defeating, sinful, or depressive thinking that generates oppressive emotions, poor decisions, and destructive behaviors.”³¹ From the perspective of Truth Therapy, the disciples’ distorted thoughts in John 11 and John 14 are examples of awfulizing and arbitrary inference. Bellini defines awfulizing as imagining the worst case possible. Awfulizing creates a spirit of fear. Instead of being fearful, disciples of Jesus could have had faith. Instead of believing the worst followers of Jesus need to trust that God is greater and has the best future planned for them. Arbitrary inference occurs when a person comes to a conclusion with insufficient, faulty, or no evidence.³² The disciples know Lazarus has died. The

²⁹ John 11:9-10.

³⁰ John 14:18-24.

³¹ Bellini, *Truth Therapy*, 47.

³² Bellini, “*Truth Therapy*,” 51 and 56.

disciples remember that Jews wanted to stone Jesus. Therefore, if they return to Jerusalem to visit Lazarus' family, then they will die. In John 14, the disciples again only focus on the fact that Jesus will be leaving them. The disciples do not trust the good news of the promise of the Holy Spirit. They believe since Jesus is leaving, God will leave them. This is not the case. The disciples need new ways of thinking that remember the promises of God's truth given to them by Jesus Christ. Through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the truth will empower them.³³ The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth will help them.³⁴ The Spirit of truth will guide them.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Truth Therapy also connect with the theological and historical foundations of this project. The theological foundations of this project focused on Wesleyan theology as a guide for discipleship formation. Wesleyan theology has a gracious orthodoxy that is open to varied points of view regarding Christian practice. The historical foundations looked at the doctrine, spirit, and discipline of the early Methodist movement. Wesleyan theology has a catholic and ecumenical spirit that is cooperative with denominations of various theological perspectives. John Wesley's catholic spirit enabled people of differing opinions to work together in loving God and others.³⁵ However, it is critical to remember Wesley's catholic spirit and gracious orthodoxy had boundaries established by the truth of God revealed in scripture, informed by the tradition of the church, shaped by reason, and experienced by the grace of God.³⁶

³³ John 14:26.

³⁴ John 15:26.

³⁵ John Wesley, "The Catholic Spirit," *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 493. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

³⁶ Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral-In John Wesley," in *Doctrine and Theology of The United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas A. Langford (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991), 76.

Wesleyan theology also informs the discipleship process for it understands spiritual formation to be an ongoing process of being perfected in love of God and neighbor. Christian conversion is a change of heart and mind. God's grace forgives a person. God's grace empowers the work of new thinking about life and behavior. According to Scott Kisker, professor of the history of Christianity at United Theological Seminary, as expressed in his podcast "Plain Truth," a key distinctive of discipleship formation in the Wesleyan tradition is the idea of being watched over in love in connected community.³⁷ In the Wesleyan theological tradition faith formation is not solitary but communal. The communal nature of faith formation in early Methodism was integrated into the class and band system. Kevin Watson notes,

Early Methodists were asked to invite others into their lives and to be willing to enter deeply into the lives of other people so that together they would grow in grace. They were committed to the idea that the Christian life is a journey of growth in grace, or sanctification. Moreover, they believed that they needed one another in order to persevere on this journey.³⁸

In the class and bands, Methodists were asked about the spiritual state of their soul. In the class meeting, the class leader would ask "How is it with your soul?"³⁹ Wesley's understanding of the soul connects spiritual formation, Truth Therapy, and Cognitive Behavior Therapy. Wesley believed a person's soul, mind, and body were interconnected. A healthy soul would help create a healthy mind and body. A disordered soul could bring about sickness in the mind and body. According to Wesley, the fall of

³⁷ Scott Kisker, "What's Going to Happen with the United Methodist Church?" Plain Truth: A Holy-Spirited Podcast, December 11, 2017, <http://plaintruth.libsyn.com/whats-going-to-happen-with-the-united-methodist-church>.

³⁸ Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2014). 26.

³⁹ Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 25.

humanity and original sin created a flawed capacity for humanity to control their wills, emotions, and behavior. Wesley believed when a person experiences Christian conversion and is forgiven of sin by the power of justifying grace, their soul is transformed. Though a Christian's soul is redeemed, their mind and body continue to need transformation by continuing to experience God's grace. This ongoing work of transformation and formation of soul, mind, and body is the sanctification. The work of sanctification is empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ Authors Paul and Cahleen Shrier offer this summary of Wesley's conception of sanctification in an article in *Pneuma*: "For Wesley, sanctification is an inward and outward process of establishing God's will in a person's life. Inward sanctification of actions and tempers is primary, but it is through outward behaviors that the inward sanctification is both accomplished and displayed."⁴¹

In other words, sanctification is the process of thinking or believing into a new way of living. Sanctification addresses not just the spiritual state of a disciple's soul but also their mind, body, and behavior. The idea of Sanctification aligns with the goals of Peter Scazzero's, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* discipleship model for both are focused on the spiritual transformation and development of the whole person. Scazzero's discipleship model is focused on helping disciples' spiritual beliefs align with their thoughts, feelings, and behavior.⁴² Scazzero argues that contemporary discipleship

⁴⁰ Paul Shrier and Cahleen Shrier, "Wesley's Sanctification Narrative: A Tool for Understanding the Holy Spirit's Work in a More Physical Soul," *Pneuma* 31, no. 2 (2009): 230-231, accessed December 15, 2018, *ATLAReligion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁴¹ Shrier and Shrier, "Wesley's Sanctification Narrative," 231.

⁴² Peter Scazzero with Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*, updated and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 51.

models have failed to address the mental and emotional health of Christian believers. He writes, “Denying any aspect of what it means to be a fully human person made in the image of God carries with it catastrophic long-term consequences—in our relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves.”⁴³

From a therapeutic perspective, the class and band meeting are similar to a group therapy experience. Cognitive Behavior and Truth Therapy help people transform unhealthy emotional reactions and behaviors into healthy ones. Cognitive Behavior Therapy helps people think their way into a better and more productive way of living. Truth Therapy helps people transform their thought and behavior patterns by focusing on God’s truth and living in God’s grace. Cognitive Behavior and Truth Therapy can occur in a traditional patient and therapist treatment session or in a group setting. In the individual or group session, the therapeutic goal is the same, helping people recognize unhealthy thoughts that create unhealthy emotions and behaviors in their ordinary course of daily life.

Wesley recognized the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Wesley saw the interplay between mind, body, and spirit in the spiritual formation of a person. Shirer and Shirer describe Wesley’s understanding of this interplay,

Wesley believed that *tempers* (our emotions) and our *dispositions* (our prolonged mental and emotional states or conditions) motivate our behavior. He believed that by God's grace our emotions and emotional character could be changed to reflect the mind of Christ.⁴⁴

⁴³ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 54.

⁴⁴ Shirer and Shirer, “Wesley’s Sanctification Narrative,” 233.

Again, this work of transformation was not done alone but in covenant community such as a class or band. In these covenant groups, people were able to become more aware of their tempers and dispositions through the perspective of others. The class and bands equipped its members to be faithful Christians in the course of daily life.

In Cognitive Behavior Therapy, a therapist or counselor helps a client recognize unhealthy thought patterns, emotions, and behaviors. With the help of a therapist, clients develop the personal skills to address unhealthy thought patterns. In the early years of Cognitive Behavior Therapy the therapeutic technique was seen as the critical component of treatment.⁴⁵ Over time, studies have determined the therapist and patient relationship has a significant impact on the effectiveness of treatment. Recent clinical studies show a strong connection between a patient's trust in their therapist and the overall effectiveness of Cognitive Behavior Therapy.⁴⁶ Effective Cognitive Behavior Therapy therapists can create strong therapeutic relationships by showing empathy, genuineness, and positive regard to their clients.⁴⁷

In Cognitive Behavior Therapy empathy is the ability to understand another person's point of view. A therapist can use validating responses as a way of showing empathy toward their patient. In Cognitive Behavior Therapy genuineness is being honest

⁴⁵ Cheryl Joy Easterbrook and Trudy Meehan, "The Therapeutic Relationship and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: A Case Study of an Adolescent Girl with Depression," *The European Journal of Counselling Psychology* [Online] 6, no. 1 (14 February 2017): 2, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://ejcop.psychopen.eu/article/view/85/html>.

⁴⁶ Easterbrook and Meehan, "The Therapeutic Relationship," 20.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey A. Cully and Andra L. Teten, *A Therapist's Guide to Brief Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (Houston, TX: Department of Veterans Affairs South Central MIRECC, 2008), 13, accessed December 15, 2018, https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn16/docs/therapists_guide_to_brief_cbtmanual.pdf.

in a professional manner. It is essential that a therapist's words, nonverbal actions, and feelings match each other. In Cognitive Behavior Therapy, positive regard is showing respect and treating a client with dignity.⁴⁸

Empathy, genuineness, and positive regard are not only essential characteristics of a therapist but are equally important for a class leader in a discipleship group. These same characteristics are essential characteristics for any leader or minister in the church. In essence, empathy, genuineness, and positive regard are basic principles addressed in the General Rules of the United Societies of the early Methodist movement. The General Rules can be summarized in the phrase “Do no harm. Do good. Grow in God’s grace.”⁴⁹ This philosophical and theological mandate suggest why covenant discipleship groups also need to be places where participants experience empathy, honesty, and dignity. A lack of concern, dishonesty, and disrespect in a Cognitive Behavior Therapy or spiritual discipleship relationship would be a significant hindrance to a person experience healing and wholeness.

A covenant group community utilizing Truth Therapy can benefit from applying the Johari Window theory. The Johari Window is a graphical display of awareness in the form of a matrix of what is known to self, not known to self, known to others, and not known to others. The matrix helps identify what is openly expressed, blind spots, hidden, and unknown.⁵⁰ Speaking truth in love can bring the blind spots and hidden areas of our

⁴⁸ Cully and Teten, *A Therapist’s Guide*, 13 and 15.

⁴⁹ John Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 8. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 270-271.

⁵⁰ Terry Linhart, *The Self-Aware Leader: Discovering Your Blind Spots to Reach Your Ministry Potential* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2017), 26.

soul, minds, and behaviors into the light. The Holy Spirit as the source of Truth can reveal the unknown, for nothing is unknown to God.

Without the perspective of others, it is difficult for people to be fully aware of their behavior and its impact upon others. Discipleship groups can be a safe place where others can help raise awareness by sharing how a person's behavior is impacting others. In this way, discipleship groups help form spirituality and emotionally aware leaders. According to Tasha Eurich's research in the area of awareness, people are not as self or emotionally aware as they think they are.⁵¹ Eurich argues that the most helpful way to become self-aware is through the external self-awareness provided by others.⁵² In other words, if one wants to be more aware of who one is, then that person should ask others how they see them. Discipleship groups speaking the truth in love and helping people recognize unhealthy thoughts, emotions, and behaviors can be a means of transforming disciples into spiritually aware, emotionally aware, and healthy leaders. This sharing must be done in a spirit of love, truth, and guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Historical foundations of this project examined Wesley's fear about the future of Methodism. In "Thoughts Upon Methodism" Wesley wrote these words of caution and concern,

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.⁵³

⁵¹ Tasha Eurich, *Insight: The Surprising Truth about How Others See Us, How We See Ourselves, and Why the Answers Matter More than We Think* (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2017), 7.

⁵² Eurich, *Insight*, 8.

⁵³ John Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Methodism," *Works*, vol. 13, 258.

The doctrine of Methodism was founded upon the belief that God's grace is available to all people—all people being able to be saved by God's grace, and all people being able to be perfected in love. The doctrine of Methodism believes in the power of God's grace to transform the heart and mind of the Christian believer. The spirit of Methodism was holiness of heart and life. Holiness being understood as loving God and neighbor. The discipline of Methodism was the class and band meeting system that helped disciples watch over each other in love. The doctrine, spirit, and discipline of Methodism, empowered by the Holy Spirit, created a spiritual environment where people could experience a transformation of heart and mind.

Again, Wesley was not only concerned with the spiritual health of people, but also the physical health of individuals. It is essential to consider the historical context in which Wesley lived. Philippa Koch, a professor in religion and American culture, describes the cultural context that influenced Wesley. She writes:

For eighteenth-century Christians, the created order, including the individual body, served as a symbol of the spiritual world. Disorder in the physical world meant something was spiritually amiss; it drew attention to the soul of the sufferer—or to the spiritual state of the suffering community—and called for the close observation in order to discern God's will.⁵⁴

Koch also argues that the Arminian influence on Wesley's theology emphasized the role the individual plays in his or her health.⁵⁵ In other words, a person's health is not determined by eternal fate but is influenced by the personal habits of that individual.

⁵⁴ Philippa Koch, "Experience and the Soul in Eighteenth-Century Medicine," *Church History* 85, no. 3 (September 2016): 553-554, accessed December 15, 2018, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁵⁵ Koch, "Experience and the Soul," 556.

Wesley also noted the communal nature of health, especially that unhealthy living conditions can impact the health of a community. For example, Wesley worked among the urban poor who lived in slums and did not have access to health care. He operated a charity medical dispensary that helped the poor in his community. In 1747 Wesley wrote the *Primitive Physic* as a means to provide helpful medical information to the general public.⁵⁶ The *Primitive Physic* bore witness to the Wesleyan theology of grace and the need for all people to experience the healing power of God's grace in their spirit and body. For Wesley, salvation's end goal was the transformation and renewal of a person's soul, mind, and body. Salvation and the process of sanctification were means of renewing the will, behavior, and emotions from the unhealthy effects of original sin.⁵⁷

When one examines the life of John Wesley, it is possible to see evidence of his transformation and growth in self-awareness. Though Cognitive Behavior Therapy had not been formally established in Wesley's life, he nevertheless practiced some of the therapeutic techniques associated with this modern therapy: mindfulness, journaling, and cognitive restructuring. Mindfulness is the process of slowing down and intentionally thinking about how your body feels.⁵⁸ Prayer and meditation are forms of mindfulness.

Wesley faithfully practiced spiritual disciplines and utilized the means of grace. Wesley had a daily routine of spending time each morning in prayer, bible study, and meditation. He kept an extensive record of his life in his journal. Wesley's journal provides direct insight into Wesley's spiritual formation. The journal also helps one see

⁵⁶ Koch, "Experience and the Soul," 579.

⁵⁷ Shrier and Shrier, "Wesley's Sanctification Narrative," 230.

⁵⁸ Ackerman, "25 Cognitive Behavior Therapy Techniques."

the transformation in Wesley's cognitive behavioral development. Wesley actively participated in a Christian covenant community, partly because he learned about the power of being watched over in love from his mother. During his childhood, his mother regularly spent individual time with John and the other children to inquire about the state of their souls.

While a student at Oxford, John and his brother Charles formed a covenant group in which the participants held each other accountable to the study of the Bible. These first Methodists challenged each other to faithfully living out scriptural Christianity. This group also was focused on being dedicated and loyal to the Church of England.⁵⁹ The label "Methodist" was a derogatory term associated with the strict legalism and ordered way of life the covenant group required of its participants. One could argue that this high form of legalism was a form of distorted polarized thinking. In Cognitive Behavior Therapy, polarized thinking is a cognitive distortion that views the world as right or wrong only. Polarized thinking is an all or nothing way of viewing life.⁶⁰

In Wesley's journal before his spiritual experience at the bible study on Aldersgate Street, there are entries in which one can read how polarized thinking impacted Wesley's faith. In particular, Wesley's entries during his time as a missionary in Georgia and his hasty return to London reveal the thoughts of a man who was afraid of death. Although Wesley was a confirmed Christian and ordained clergyman in the church, he did not believe he had been forgiven his sins. Consider this selection from his lengthy entry from his journal dated Friday, May 19, 1738:

⁵⁹ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 258.

⁶⁰ Ackerman, "25 Cognitive Behavior Therapy Techniques."

All the time I was at Savannah I was thus beating the air. Being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, which, by a living faith in Him, bringeth salvation “to every one that believeth,” I sought to establish my own righteousness; and so laboured in the fire all my days. I was now properly “under the law;” I knew that “the law” of God was “spiritual; I consented to it that it was good.” Yea, “I delighted in it, after the inner man.” Yet was I “carnal, sold under sin.” Every day was I constrained to cry out, “What I do, I allow not: For what I would, I do not but what I hate, that I do. To will is” indeed” present with me: But how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me: Even “the law in my members, warring against the law of my mind,” and still “bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.”⁶¹

Wesley was able to experience transformation from this faulty way of thinking because truth was spoken to him in love. Truth Therapy and Cognitive Behavior therapy are means by which truth can be spoken in love. Truth Therapy uses the power of God's grace to help a person see distorted thinking, emotions, and behavior in their life. Cognitive Behavior therapy uses awareness to help a person become aware of distorted thinking, emotions, and behavior. As mentioned in the historical foundations of this project, Peter Böhler was one of several people who helped John Wesley become aware of the distorted spiritual thinking and behavior in his life. Böhler provided external awareness that helped Wesley see blind spots in his life.

After Wesley’s spiritual encounter with the Holy Spirit at the bible study on Aldersgate Street, he became personally aware of God’s truth in his life. After Aldersgate, Wesley's leadership and ministry were transformed because he experienced God's grace assuring him of God's love for him.⁶² Consider Wesley’s journal entry on May 25, 1738:

⁶¹ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 100–101.

⁶² Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 103.

The moment I awaked, "Jesus, Master," was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon him, and my soul waiting on him continually. Being again at St. Paul's in the afternoon, I could taste the good word of God in the anthem, which began, "My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: With my mouth will I ever be showing forth thy truth from one generation to another. "Yet the enemy injected a fear, "If thou dost believe, why is there not a more sensible change?" I answered, (yet not I,) "That I know not. But this I know, I have 'now peace with God.' And I sin not today, and Jesus my Master has forbid me to take thought for the morrow."

"But is not any sort of fear," continued the tempter, "a proof that thou dost not believe?" I desired my Master to answer for me; and opened his Book upon those words of St. Paul, "Without were fightings, within were fears." Then, inferred I, well may fears be within me; but I must go on, and tread them under my feet.⁶³

From this point onward, Wesley was focused on helping others experience the transformation and power of God's grace in their lives. Again, the central place for this transformation occurred in the covenant class and band meetings of the Methodist Societies. It was in these covenant communities where the Holy Spirit guided people. It was in these covenant communities where the joys and challenges of daily living were shared, and where the soul, mind, body, and spirit of group members were watched over in a spirit of grace and love. These covenant communities formed disciples with transformed hearts and minds that were seen in transformed and renewed living. These transformed disciples brought about a great Methodist revival in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in America and Europe that "spread scriptural holiness across the land."

Greensboro First needs to develop covenant groups that embrace the theology, spirit, and discipline of the class and band systems of the Methodist Societies. It would be highly beneficial if the principles of Truth Therapy could be taught to the

⁶³ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 13, 104.

congregation. Truth Therapy could empower the church's lay leadership, ministry staff, and clergy to be emotionally healthy leaders.

If discipleship formation at Greensboro First can happen in a grace-filled covenant community where the truth is spoken in love, then God only knows the transformation that can take place. Disciples seeking the truth together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit can create a new sense of personal, relational, and organizational awareness. Discipleship groups can be beneficial in creating spiritually and emotionally aware leaders. In other words, if one wants to be more aware about who one is, then one should ask others how their perception. Discipleship groups speaking the truth in love and helping people recognize unhealthy thoughts, emotions, and behaviors can be a means of transforming disciples into spiritually aware, emotionally aware, and healthy leaders. These are the type of leaders Greensboro First needs to fulfill its mission of “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.”

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Greensboro First United Methodist Church in Greensboro, Georgia has two campuses. The church is continuing to discover how to effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ in a multi-site ministry context. The two campuses have made it difficult for the church to have an intentional and organized discipleship ministry that transcends campus location. While there are Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and programs for youth and children, these programs are not aligned or systematic. The lack of a systematic discipleship program is hindering the church from making mature disciples of Jesus Christ. The lack of a discipleship program is also limiting the church in its work of forming leaders who are disciple makers. Participation in this leadership class was intended to create interest in forming a systematic discipleship program at Greensboro First United Methodist Church.

Researching and writing the project's four foundational papers impacted the development and implementation of this project. The first ideation of the project was on the challenges pastors and church staff have working in a multi-site congregation. However, after a thorough study of the project's context at Greensboro First United

Methodist Church in Greensboro, Georgia, the focus changed away from pastors and church staff toward the spiritual needs of the congregation.

This research project, then, integrated discoveries and insights from the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations. The core content of the leadership development class drew from these foundational sources. These discoveries and insights helped shape this project into an effective option for creating an intentional system and community of disciples who are disciple-makers and leaders in the church.

Methodology

Training was implemented during this project that was intended to prepare leaders for a systematic discipleship program at Greensboro First United Methodist Church. The training was designed so it could transcend location. These classes can be taught in a multitude of contexts.

These training modules were guided by Wesleyan and Methodist theological traditions and values. The project included four teaching modules that shared important information in the fields of Wesleyan theology, Methodist heritage and doctrine, and faith formation practices of covenant community in a Methodist band and class meeting format. The teaching modules were organized so participants would want to continue meeting in a covenant group. They were also designed so participants would feel prepared to lead a covenant community group in the church.

The training sessions began with a teaching component, and the subject matter of each session came from the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations work of the project. Each session built upon the content of previous sessions.

For the second half of each class, participants discussed the teaching content and anything else that arose from their conversations with each other. Participants also kept journals for which they were provided guided questions intended to help them evaluate their spiritual life. The journal questions were also the same questions that were used as conversation starters in the small group discussion time in class. The journal work was designed to enhance and open up the small group discussion that took place in class. The last class session included the sharing of spiritual autobiographies in the small group discussion time.

The class sessions were video recorded as a way to document what took place in each session. The recorder was stationary, but the placement of the camera varied in each session. The main purpose of recording the sessions was to capture any possible changes in the group dynamics over the four weeks. In past class experiences, participants often discussed the change in group dynamics, but unless it is recorded it is hard to see the changes.

Other expected outcomes included participants having a better sense of God's grace at work in their lives and being better equipped to help Greensboro First become more united and focused in its mission and ministry. The context associates, in particular the senior and new associate pastor, helped plan the project and its implementation. At first, the context associates were to participate in the project itself, however, my professional associates encouraged me to reconsider. They thought the presence of the senior pastor in a discipleship group could create a power imbalance and impact group participation. The senior pastor agreed with the decision and gave approval for the project, its focus, and intended goals.

Like the context associates, the professional associates were very helpful in giving input into the planning of the project. As active members of Greensboro First United Methodist Church they have a very good understanding of the context. They helped me address difficulties that occurred when I was unexpectedly moved to a new pastoral appointment before the start of the research project. The changes that had to be made to the project included reducing the number of class sessions from six to four and recording the sessions for observation of participant body language.

In addition to helping me navigate the difficulties of a placement change, my professional associates also suggested that I invite the senior pastor, associate pastor, and a professional associate to teach three of the class sessions. It seemed reasonable to think that having the senior and associate pastors teach a class session would not create the power imbalance that might have come from them being participants in the class sessions, while at the same time involving them in the implementation of the project. Due to scheduling conflicts, the senior and associate pastor were unable to teach a class session, so I taught the first three sessions and co-taught the last session with one of my professional associates.

October of 2019 was determined to be the best time for this research project to take place, even though as of July 2019, I was no longer the associate pastor of Greensboro First United Methodist Church, but had become the pastor of Lavonia First United Methodist Church. October 2019 also worked well with the schedule of ministry events taking place in Lavonia. In August 2019, I began announcing the project timeline and recruiting participants at Greensboro.

Because I wanted to have at least ten, and no more than twenty, participants in this class I personally invited key leaders, such as the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and laity who had expressed a desire for the church to begin a covenant group ministry, to participate in the classes. The other participants responded to announcements that were in the church bulletin and emails. A total of twelve participants responded. One participant resigned from the project after the first session. Attendance varied from class to class, but overall, I was pleased with attendance and participation.

Implementation

The initial class session met on the first Thursday in October. Eleven participants attended this first session. I welcomed the participants and gave them the Human Subject Research consent waver, the journal they would use during the course, and a copy of John Wesley's "Thoughts Upon Methodism" and "The Character of a Methodist." Participants also received a copy of the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality survey. They were directed to take the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality survey before they completed the course pre-test survey.

The Emotionally Healthy Spirituality survey was to be used as a tool to help participants start the initial evaluation of their spiritual condition that would be recorded in the pre-test survey. I did not ask the participants to share the results from the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality questionnaire; however, two or three participants did later comment how the survey helped them think of their spiritual life in a broader perspective.

In the first class, I gave a general overview of the course content and the topics for each of the four class sessions. I also thought it was important to let the participants know about their roles as participants in the project and my completion of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry Degree. Participants were encouraged to participate freely and honestly. If they did not feel like participating or sharing, they were free not to do so. I was clear to tell the participants that their role was to evaluate and provide feedback on the course material and experience, so it could be improved for future use in local churches.

The project's biblical foundation was the subject of the teaching component for the first session. I explained to the participants that this was a leadership development course and not a bible study. The biblical foundation material was intended to explain how scripture shapes the development of Christian leaders and disciples.

The teaching component began with sharing a summary of the background, theme, and context of the Gospel of John. The study shifted to a focus on John 14. I explained the context of John 14 and its place in Jesus' farewell discourse. In short, Jesus is equipping his disciples to lead and stay together in the time of challenge and uncertainty that will follow his arrest, death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven. Jesus wants his disciples, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to keep trusting and following him as the way, truth, and life.

I provided brief definitions of the key words "way, truth, and life." Way is not just a road, but a pattern of living. Truth is the essence or quality of teaching. Life is not just existence or being, but a spiritual state. The grammatical structure of John 14:6 includes an expegetical use of "and." This structure means the word that comes after "and"

explains the word that comes before. In short, Jesus's affirmation is that he is the *way* and that this way is truth and life.¹ The disciples are not to follow Jesus as knowledge, but Jesus himself.

One of the foundations of this project is the importance for church leaders to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I encouraged participants to spend time looking at their spiritual condition and relationship status with Jesus Christ during their participation in the class. I also explained that class sessions would give them an opportunity to discern how their relationship with Jesus influenced their daily lives and relationships. The guiding question from them was "Do you know Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life in their heart?"

To help explain what this meant, I shared the following quote from Rudolph Bultmann:

Jesus is the truth; he does not simply state it. One does not come to him to ask about truth; one comes to him as the truth. This truth does not exist as a doctrine, which could be understood, preserved, and handed on, so that the teacher is discharged and surpassed. Rather the position a man takes vis-à-vis the Revealer decides not whether he knows the truth, but whether his is "of the truth," that is to say, whether his existence is determined by the truth, whether the truth is the ground on which his existence is based.²

I took a moment to explain how reading *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolsinger influenced my selection of John 14 as the biblical foundation for this project. Bolsinger argues that western Christianity is in a time of great change and uncertainty

¹ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4, Sacra Pagina Series, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 395.

² Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. by G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 606-607.

and needs adaptive leaders who can guide the church. In this time of uncertainty, Jesus stands ready to be our way, give us truth, and lead us to life.

The discussion then shifted to how small covenant accountability groups can help disciples follow Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. I explained how the other class sessions will include time for discussion and sharing with two or three other people in the class. The small group time was meant to give them an opportunity to share life together. Their participation in the small group would help determine if covenant small groups can help Greensboro First make disciples of Jesus Christ.

The class concluded with a repeat of general instructions for the pre-test survey, journal writing exercises, and readings for the next class. The main component of the journal writing homework was answering these questions: “How is it with your soul? What are your struggles and successes? How might God be working in your life?”

This session did not have small group discussion time, but the class participants did ask questions and discuss the content from the teaching. I ended the class session with a prayer.

The second session met for class on October 10, 2019. There were eleven participants at the second class. There was one participant who was unable to attend the first session but attended this class. There was also one participant who withdrew from the class after the first session. The project’s historical foundation was the focus of this class session.

To prepare for this session, students were to read John Wesley’s essay “Thoughts Upon Methodism.” Each student was given a copy at the first session. Students were also to have completed their journal writing assignments for the week.

The class session began with a general check-in asking during which participants were asked how they were doing this week, encouraged to share prayer requests, and had an opening prayer. I distributed a guide with examples and instructions for writing their spiritual autobiography. I directed the participants to be as open and detailed in their writing as they felt comfortable; however, they needed to be mindful of the time allowed for sharing their autobiography with the other people in their small group. I explained again how “Thoughts Upon Methodism” could be considered an example of an abbreviated spiritual autobiography.

To start our discussion about John Wesley’s life, I read the following quote from “Thoughts Upon Methodism”:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.³

I explained how this is a very popular quote and has been shared many times in essays and articles about the future of the United Methodist Church. I shared a summary of the childhood family of John and Charles Wesley. I thought it was important to explain the state of the Church of England during the days of Wesley and how the church was connected to the government. The establishment of the Oxford Holy Club was explained.

The discussion then transitioned to John and Charles Wesley’s missionary endeavor to the colony of Georgia. Some of the participants were aware of the story, but most of the participants had not heard the experience explained in such detail. I read a

³ John Wesley, “Thoughts Upon Methodism,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 13 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 258, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

lengthy excerpt from John Wesley's journal about the great storm he survived on the journey to Georgia. The excerpt included Wesley's observation of the response of the Moravians who were also traveling on the ship to Georgia. I thought it was important for participants to hear Wesley's own account of this frightening ordeal.

I explained how the near-death experience of the storm and the witness of the Moravians caused John Wesley to have an awakening to his spiritual condition as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Again, I thought it was important for participants to hear Wesley's own words describing his new sense of awareness of his spiritual state. In particular I wanted participants to hear this entry from Wesley's journal of his interaction with Mr. Spangenberg:

Mr. Oglethorpe returned from Savannah with Mr. Spangenberg, one of the Pastors of the Germans. I soon found what spirit he was of; and asked his advice with regard to my own conduct. He said, "My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?" I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" I paused, and said, "I know he is the Saviour of the world." "True," replied he; "but do you know he has saved you?" I answered, "I hope he has died to save me." He only added, "Do you know yourself?" I said, "I do." But I fear they were vain words.⁴

The teaching then shifted to Wesley's relationship trouble with Sophie Hopkins, his fleeing of the colony, and return to England in shame. I explained how John Wesley's failed missionary trip to Georgia opened up his heart to discover Jesus as the way, truth, and life. The missionary trip to Georgia allowed Wesley to cross paths with the Moravians whose theology of a personal witness of assurance opened up Wesley to seek it in his own spiritual life. I also shared how Wesley's trip to Georgia introduced him to

⁴ Wesley, *Works*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, 23.

Peter Böhler who would play a vital role in Wesley receiving the assurance of his salvation at the bible study on Aldersgate street on May 24, 1738.

I read the following letter of encouragement that Peter Böhler sent to Wesley on May 8, 1738:

I love you greatly, and think much of you in my journey, wishing and praying that the tender mercies of Jesus Christ the Crucified, whose bowels were moved towards you more than six thousand years ago, may be manifested to your soul: That you may taste and then see, how exceedingly the Son of God has loved you, and loves you still; and that so you may continually trust in Him, and feel his life in yourself. Beware of the sin of unbelief; and if you have not conquered it yet, see that you conquer it this very day, through the blood of Jesus Christ. Delay not, I beseech you, to believe in *your* Jesus Christ; but so put Him in mind of his promises to poor sinners, that He may not be able to refrain from doing for you, what He hath done for so many others. O how great, how inexpressible, how unexhausted is his love! Surely he is now ready to help; and nothing can offend Him but our unbelief.

The Lord bless you! Abide in faith, love, teaching, the communion of saints; and briefly, in all which we have in the New Testament. I am, Your unworthy Brother, Peter Böhler.”⁵

I used this letter as an example of how we can encourage others in their spiritual journey as disciples of Jesus Christ. The historical teaching included discussion about Wesley’s heart-warming experience at the bible study on Aldersgate street. Most of the participants had heard of this because of their involvement in United Methodist churches. However, the story that led up to Aldersgate was not as familiar to the class.

The class session then shifted to an explanation of how after his Aldersgate experience, Wesley established the United Societies. I provided an explanation of the structure, role, and expectations of membership in the society, class, and band meetings.

⁵ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, 94–95.

The early Methodist societies, classes, and bands would be the focus of the next two class sessions.

Before concluding the teaching component, I briefly shared some information about John Wesley's relationship with John Fletcher. I connected Wesley's relationship with Fletcher to the biblical foundation of John 14. I explained how Fletcher was to be the leader of the Methodist movement after the death of John Wesley, but Fletcher died before Wesley. I strongly believe that the death of Fletcher impacted the future of the Wesleyan movement. John Wesley wrote much about Methodism, but the spirit of the movement is transferred from person to person. The spirit of Methodism cannot be taught, but rather it is caught by personal relationships.

The class session concluded with fifteen minutes of discussion time in small groups. Participants were instructed to discuss their experiences with the class so far, any new information they learned, and what they hoped the class would help them accomplish. The participants were also instructed to talk about their journal writing experience and share as they felt comfortable. I provided instructions for preparing for the next session and closed the class with prayer.

The third class session met on Thursday, October 17, 2019. There were seven participants at this class. Two participants were unable to attend, due to travel plans. Rev. Holloway, one of my professional associates, attended this class session. His role was to observe but there were a few times when he participated by making comments or answering questions asked of him. The class began with prayer and a review of the content from the previous sessions.

From the first session, I reminded the participants of the biblical foundation for this project. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of truth. Disciples and Christian leaders need a personal relationship with Jesus to fully experience him as the way, truth, and life. From the second session, I provided a synopsis of the life of John Wesley and his transformation that came from having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

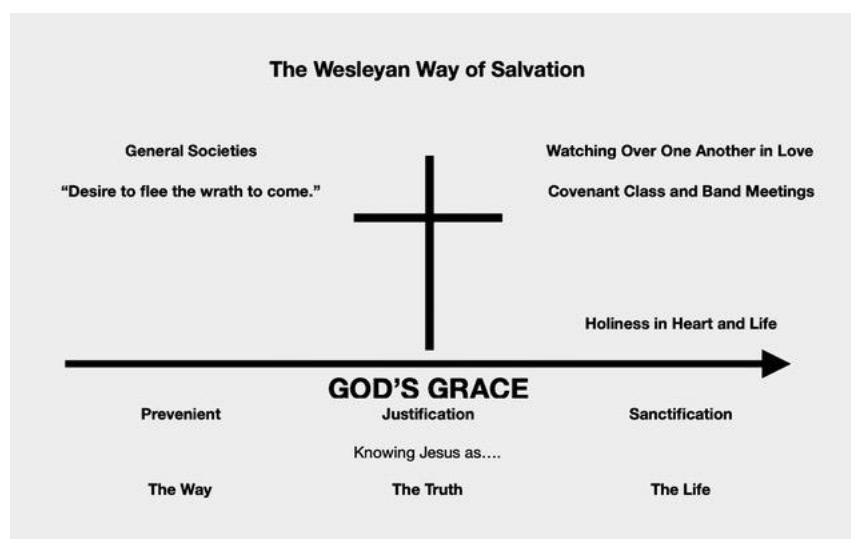
In preparation for this class session, participants were to have read “The Character of a Methodist.” Participants shared a few questions and comments about the reading. The discussion about the reading provided a transition into the presentation of the theological foundation for the project. The main goals of this session were to explain the Wesleyan definition of grace, the Wesleyan order of salvation, and role of covenant groups in growing in grace.

The structure of the Methodist societies, classes, and bands was introduced in class session two. I provided another overview of the structure and purpose of the societies, classes, and bands, so participants who might not have been at the last session would have the information. I reminded the class “How is it with your soul?” was the guiding question for the early Methodist covenant groups. The structure of the Methodist movement was one that enabled Christians to watch over each other in love.

Class discussion moved to our focus on the theology of grace. Participants were asked to define grace. I shared the official definition of grace from the *Book of Discipline* which is that grace is, “[t]he undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. While the grace of God is undivided, it

precedes salvation as “prevenient grace,” continues in “justifying grace,” and is brought to fruition in “sanctifying grace.”⁶

To help participants see how the Wesleyan order of salvation is a reflection of the Wesleyan definition of grace.



I also shared Kevin M. Watson and Scott T. Kisker’s “*four all’s*” of the Wesleyan Doctrine of Salvation. The Wesleyan doctrine of salvation affirms that all need to be saved, all can be saved, all can know they are saved, and all can be saved to the uttermost.⁷

Class discussion then moved to considering John Wesley’s generous and gracious orthodoxy. I explained that Wesley’s theology reflected a “catholic spirit.” Wesley’s

⁶ The United Methodist Church, “Our Theological Task,” *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 51-52.

⁷ Kevin M. Watson and Scott T. Kisker, *The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017), 66.

gracious orthodoxy is a theme in “The Character of a Methodist.” Wesley writes, “But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.”⁸

John Wesley understood Methodism to be a contemporary expression of the biblical Christianity that was lived out in the witness of the early church. He sought to recapture “the religion of the primitive church, of the whole church in the purest ages.”⁹ According to John Wesley’s understanding, the primitive church was far more united than the fractured body of Christ that exists today with its countless denominations and movements.

John Wesley believed and taught that the root of scriptural Christianity was love of God and love of neighbor. Wesley recognized that there were a wide variety of ways Christians understood the Bible and lived out their faith. Wesley did not necessarily agree with the different doctrines or practices of other denominations. If these differences did not stand in conflict with Wesley’s understanding of primitive biblical Christianity, however, Wesley politely respected them. If differing theological practices did not hinder people from loving God and neighbor, then Wesley appreciated them with a “catholic spirit.” The following from Wesley’s sermon, “The Catholic Spirit,” expresses the character of his cooperative spirit:

But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union; yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may

⁸ John Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 8 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 340, Logos Bible Software 7.14.

⁹ J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Being United Methodist: What It Means, Why It Matters* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 5.

unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.¹⁰

A participant asked how this information connects with The United Methodist Church's ongoing discussion about homosexuality and the church. Because I did not want to spend too much of the class discussion time on this controversial issue, I provided a summary of the official teaching of The United Methodist Church on human sexuality and homosexuality. At this point, my professional associate was also helpful in answering questions. I brought the question back to the focus of this class by sharing how the current discussions about human sexuality in the church would probably be much different if the church still had covenant groups that were dedicated to watching over each other in love.

The remainder of the class session was spent in small group time. I instructed the small groups to freely discuss anything that came up in their journal writing or the class session. The small groups had about twenty minutes of discussion. I provided instructions for the next class session and offered a closing prayer.

The final class session met on Thursday, October 24, 2019. Ten participants attended the last class session. Rev. Holloway attended this session and taught about the means of grace. The main component of this last session was the participants sharing their spiritual autobiographies with their small group.

Before Rev. Holloway taught his material, I provided another review of the previous class sessions. The review of previous class sessions was meant to help students

¹⁰ John Wesley, "The Catholic Spirit," *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 493. Logos Bible Software 7.14.

who might have missed a session. The review of previous course content also helped convey how the biblical, historical, and theological foundations build upon one another for the focus of the course. I reminded the participants that the goal of this course was to help them grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. I highlighted how John Wesley's crisis of faith enabled him to discover Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life.

Rev. Holloway taught on the means of grace. He shared the four components of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (scripture, tradition, experience, and reason) with the class. He explained how reason gives us the freedom to engage our faith and spiritual life with our minds. Rev. Holloway explained that the means of grace is how God works grace into our lives. He also explained how John Wesley divided grace into two categories; works of piety and works of mercy. Works of piety include scripture reading, prayer, worship, and communion. Works of mercy are doing good works, feeding the hungry, giving to those in need, visiting prisoners, and so forth.

Rev. Holloway reminded the class that the means of grace have no power within themselves to save a person. The means of grace simply enable us to experience God's grace in our lives. It is important to keep God first and above all things. Rev. Holloway told the class it was important for the church to create an environment where people can come to know and love God. It is also important that the church be a place where people learn to love and serve others.

The class time transitioned to the sharing of spiritual autobiographies. In order to help open the discussion, Rev. Holloway shared a brief summary of his faith journey. I also shared a brief summary of my faith journey. Participants joined together in their small groups and shared their spiritual autobiographies. The small groups had the rest of

the class time to share their spiritual autobiographies. When all the participants had shared their story, I concluded the class with some final instructions about journals, course evaluation, and post-test survey. I ended the class session with a prayer.

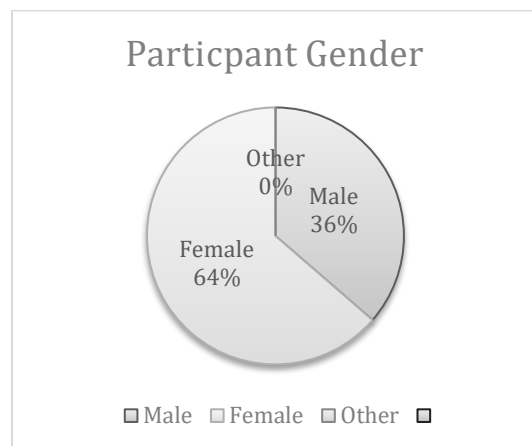
Analysis of Data

This section will summarize relevant information recorded through the pre and post-test surveys, the course evaluation, and journal writing experience survey, including results and analysis. The quality of the class recordings is too poor to provide pertinent evaluation. The video recordings failed to capture the activity of class participants, though the audio from the video recordings was helpful in documenting what happened in each class session.

The focus of this project was to evaluate the effectiveness of the class sessions as a spiritual leadership development module at Greensboro First United Methodist Church. Pre and post-test surveys and the course evaluation provided the primary means of evaluation. The data and results from relevant pre and post-test questions are as follows.

The first seven questions of the pre and post-test survey collected basic demographic information from the participants. Everyone reported that they were members of the church, had been baptized, supported the church financially, and how long they were members. This ranged from ten months to thirty-eight years. All participants except one reported that they were over fifty-five years old. One participant was older than forty-five. Ten of the participants reported that they were married and one was a widow. The gender breakdown of class participants is seen in the chart below. I wish more men would have participated in the class. From my experience at the church, I

was not surprised that there was more female participation. Women tend to be more active in classes and studies at the church than men.



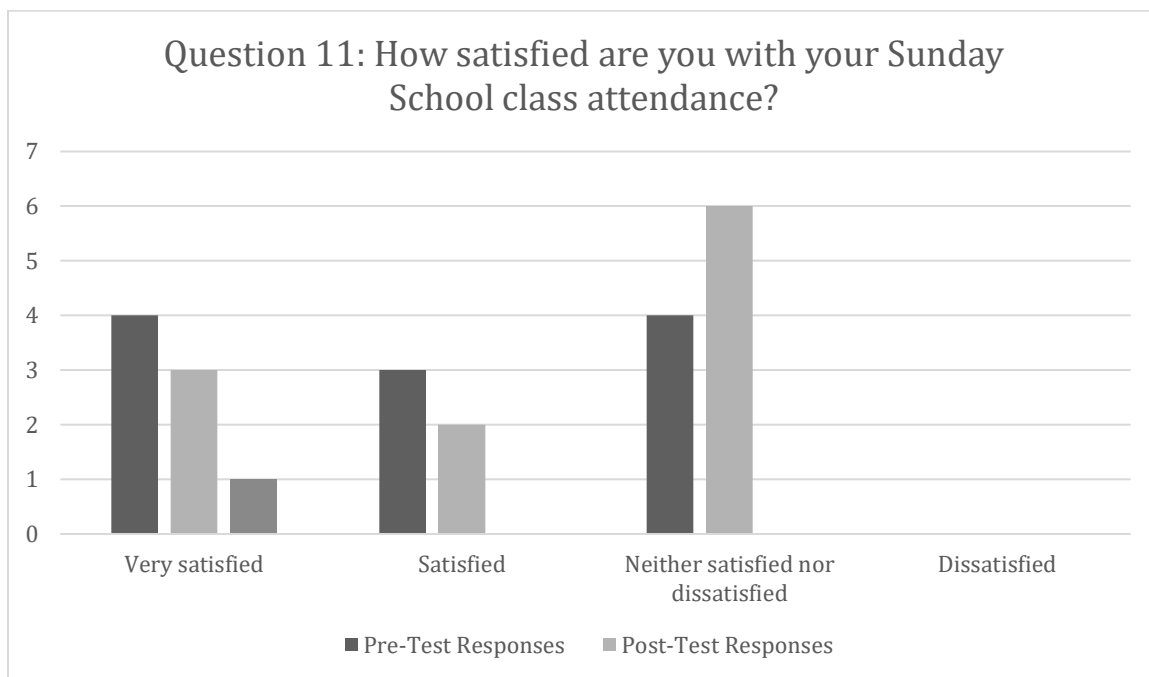
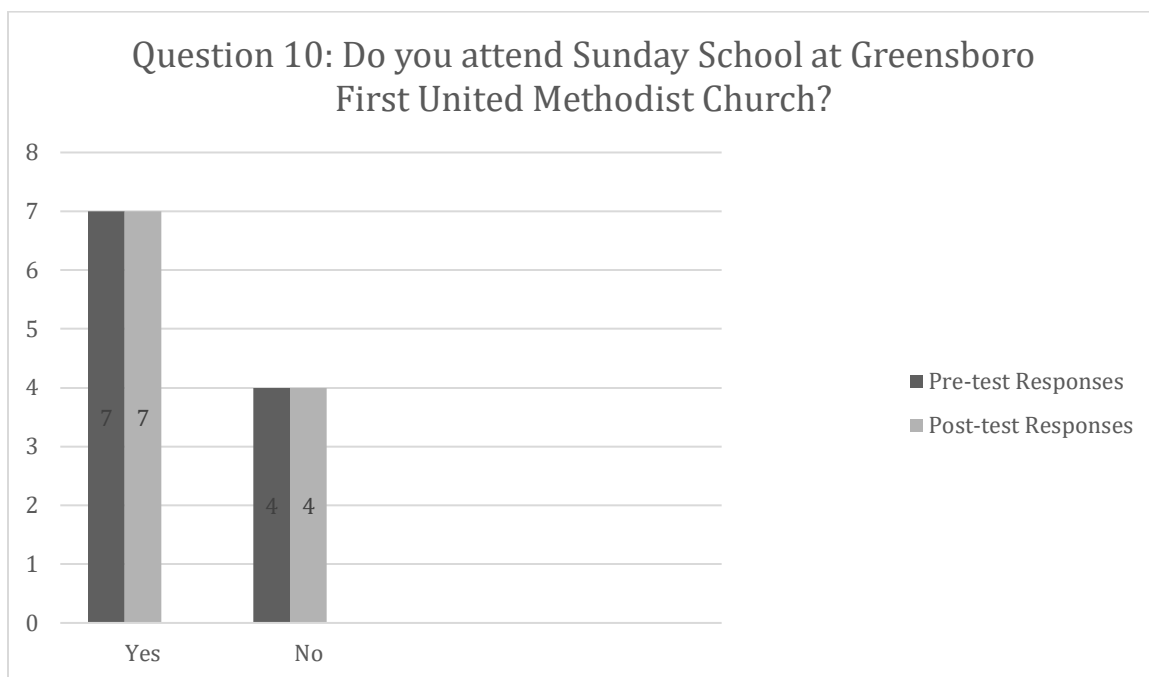
After reviewing the demographic information provided, it appears that the participants were representative of the congregation at Greensboro First. Participants were not asked to provide demographic information about their race and ethnicity; however, one of the eleven participants is an African-American. This participant is one of four African American church members.¹¹ The age of participants was reflective of the overall age of the congregation as the majority of church members are over forty years old. The years of church membership also reflects the congregation. This congregation includes new members, members who have been part of the church for fewer than five years, members who have been part of the church for more than ten years, and a few church members who have been part of the church for more than twenty years. Overall,

¹¹ 2018 End of Year Reports, Table 1, accessed December 29, 2019, <https://data.ngumc.org/ngpages/stats/tableschurch.aspx>

the participants do reflect a reasonable cross-section of the congregation. It might have been helpful for youth and young adults to participate, but the class was designed and planned for adult participation.

The next thirteen questions in the pre and post-test survey were used to evaluate participants' level of church participation and engagement in spiritual formation practices. All of the participants responded that they attended church at least three times a month. There was no significant change in worship attendance after participation in the class. Since pre-test participation was already high, I did not expect participation in the class to impact worship attendance. If worship attendance had declined after participating in the class, that would have been a point of concern and further investigation.

Participants were also asked about their Sunday school attendance. 64% of the class participants attend Sunday School. This was not surprising because Christian education and Sunday School are areas of ministry that need improvement; thus, the focus of the project on development of a systematic discipleship program.



Question 11 asked participants to evaluate their satisfaction with their Sunday School attendance. I was surprised to see in the post-test responses a decrease in those who were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their Sunday School experience. Perhaps

participation in this class caused respondents to further examine their attendance and experience in Sunday school. The Sunday school classes at the church tend to be more of a lecture format. The sessions of this class began with a lecture format, but transitioned to more peer discussion. More investigation might reveal that participants would rather have Sunday school classes that include discussion instead of only lecture as the primary means of sharing information.

Again, Sunday school is an area of growth for the church. The 2018 End of Year Reports for the church list average Sunday School attendance for all ages to be eighty-nine. This equals 28% of the average worship attendance of 309.¹² It seems that the number of project participants who attend Sunday School is a larger percentage when compared to the entire congregation. This is also evidence of the participants being active church members.

Responses to questions 12 and 13¹³ reveal that over half of the participants are in a small group that meets on a weekly basis. According to the post-test, one participant was no longer in a small group. One goal of this project was to increase church member participation in a small group. I am not concerned about the decrease in participation in a small group by one person. There could be several factors behind this change, such as the group disbanded.

Questions 14 and 15 were used to gauge the level of financial support to the church (Do you support the church financially? and how satisfied are you with your

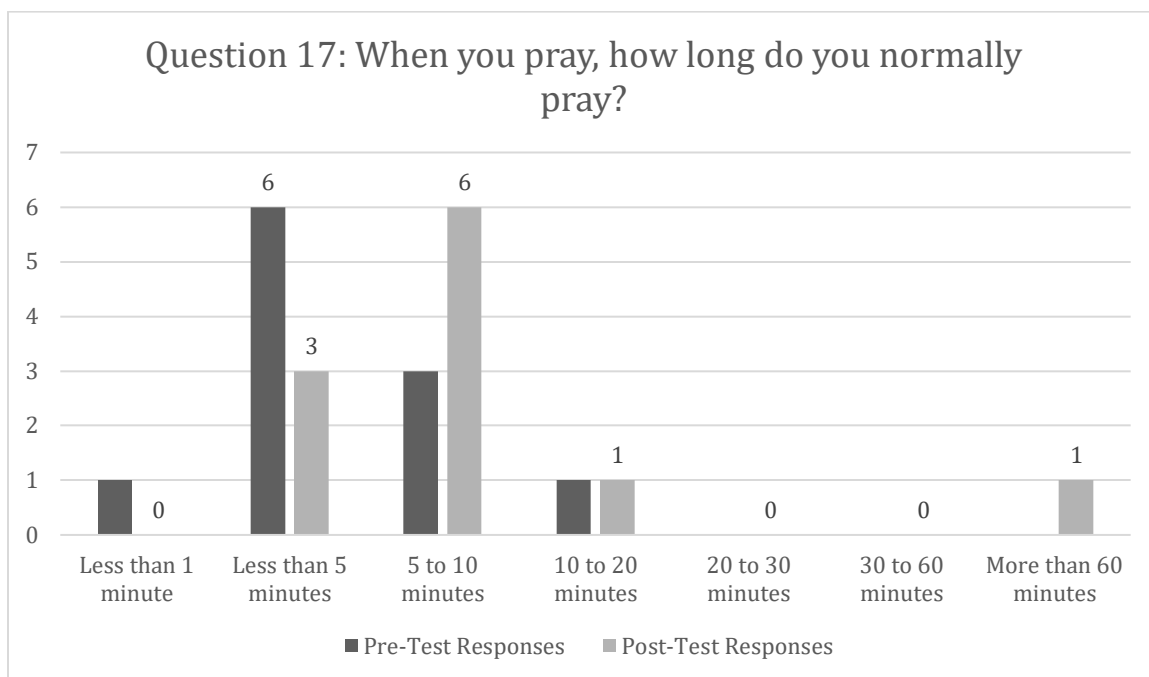
¹² 2018 End of Year Reports, Table 1 Accessed January 1, 2020.
<https://data.ngumc.org/ngpages/stats/tableschurch.aspx>

¹³ Question 12 was: Are you in a Christian-based small group (a group where people gather for prayer, support, and sharing life together)? Question 13: If so, how often does the group meet?

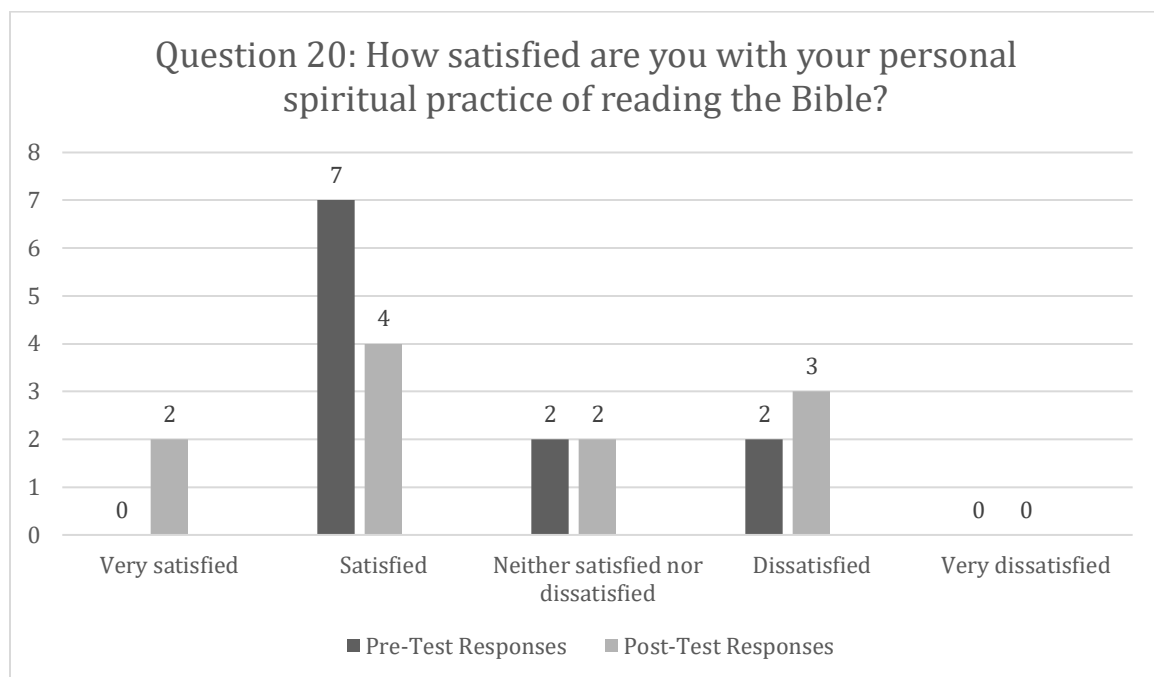
financial support to the church? It appears that all the respondents support the church financially. Only one respondent was dissatisfied with their financial support of the church. Post-test results show a slight increase in the number of participants who are satisfied with their level of giving along with a decrease of those who were “very satisfied” and “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.” “Thoughts Upon Methodism” has a warning about riches. Perhaps reading “Thoughts Upon Methodism” caused the participants to think about their stewardship practices. In my opinion the responses do not show a significant change worthy of follow up.

Questions 16, 17, and 18¹⁴ asked participants to share information about their prayer life. It is telling that all of the respondents spend time in prayer every day. Post-test responses to question 17 appear to note an overall increase in the time participants spent each day in prayer, though the majority of the class still spends less than 20 minutes a day in prayer. It also appears from responses to question 18, that fewer than half of respondents are satisfied with their personal prayer life. This could indicate a need to include more teaching about the practice of prayer with the class.

¹⁴ 16: How often do you spend time in prayer each week? 17: When you pray, how long do you normally pray? 18: How satisfied are you with your personal spiritual practice of prayer?



Questions 19 and 20 asked respondents to share information about their Bible reading practice. It seems as though there was no significant change in Bible reading practice between the pre and post-test. The responses show that most of the participants read the Bible more than three days per week. Over half of the respondents read the Bible every day. Responses to question 20 seem to indicate a slight increase in the number of participants who are “very satisfied” with their Bible reading. The post-test also indicates that three participants were “dissatisfied” with their Bible reading practice at the conclusion of the course. Perhaps, the course made participants more aware of the need to read and study the Bible. Reading the Bible was not a primary part of the class. Participants, however, were asked to memorize scripture and use it to guide their journal writing.



Again, these questions were used to gain an insight into class participants' church participation and personal spiritual practices. Before completing the Pre-Test survey, participants were asked to complete the *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Personal Assessment*. This assessment was used as a tool to help the participants evaluate their spiritual life in a broader perspective. It would be helpful to ask participants to complete this assessment in six months or a year from the completion of the project to see if there had been significant change in their evaluation of their spiritual life. The time constraints of this project limited the use of the *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Personal Assessment*.

The survey sample and limited time frame of the course also hindered the evaluation of the participant responses. The survey sample is too small for reasonable and defensible quantitative evaluation. The four-week project period was also not long

enough for valid and defensible quantitative evaluation. However, the survey sample and data can be evaluated for qualitative insights.

From my qualitative review of the responses to questions 8 to 20, it appears that there was no significant change in the spiritual practices of participants. It also seems that there was no significant change in the participants' satisfaction with their spiritual practices. However, I think it is telling that there was an increased post-test response of "dissatisfied" in regard to the practice of prayer and Bible reading. Perhaps participation in the course made the respondents more aware of their practice of prayer and Bible reading. The responses are not identifiable, so it will not be possible to ask respondents why they are now more dissatisfied with their practice of prayer and Bible reading.

The pre-test and post-test also had eight open response questions. These questions allowed participants to answer them with their own words. The following questions and responses reveal some insights into participants' definition and understanding of grace and faith before and after the class sessions.

Both the pre and post-test definition of grace (question 21) included these responses:

Free gift of mercy.
 A gift from our Lord of forgiveness.
 Not sure I know how.
 God's gifts of love freely given.
 God's love and kindness in the face of our sinfulness and imperfection.
 God's gift to me.
 God's outpouring of His loving care on His people.

These answers were not surprising, for most of the participants were active in church and Sunday school. Grace is a common theological idea shared in worship and in Christian education classes. It was encouraging to see how most of the respondents recognize grace

as a gift from God. Unfortunately, participants did not define grace as “an enabling power.” The spiritual power of grace needs to be further taught in future class sessions.

Grace is a gift and a source of spiritual power in the life of a Christian.

Question 22 asked participants to define faith. Some of the pre-test responses included:

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.
 A life journey that one follows Jesus and his teachings.
 Believing something will happen without my influence.
 Believe in things you cannot see.
 Active belief in God; trust in God.
 Believing in something that is unseen but very real.
 One’s total belief in the Triune God and Biblical promises.

Post-test responses continued the idea of belief, but also referenced action. It appears from the open-ended pre and post-test responses that there was no noticeable change in participants’ understanding and definition of faith. It further seems that participants understand faith to be an expression of belief. The post-test responses also show some of the participants identify faith with action and knowing. The course material did address faith as more than assent to doctrine, but also faith and trust in God in a personal way.

Question 23 asked participants to define salvation. Pre-test responses included the following:

Being saved through the sacrifice of Jesus.
 The knowledge of knowing that we have life after death through Jesus.
 Everlasting peace with God.
 Being delivered from power and penalty of sin.
 A free gift from God through the one-time sacrifice on the cross that He made in my place so that I could be forgiven and reconciled with God.
 Being saved from my sins.

These definitions were not surprising. In my experience salvation is seen primarily being “saved from sin.” The class teaching tried to convey a richer understanding of salvation that is part of Wesleyan theology. It appears from the following post-test definition, “Holiness of heart and life and means by which God's law is established” that some participants now include holiness of life as part of salvation. I think more time needs to be spent in conveying holiness of heart and life as part of salvation in a Wesleyan perspective. The concept of salvation as being simply saved is sadly the common understanding for many Christians.

Question 24 asked respondents to describe what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It appears from the open-ended pre and post-test responses that there was no noticeable change in participants’ understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It appears that both pre and post-test responses focus on following the life and teaching of Jesus. The class teaching spent a significant amount of time on what it means to follow Jesus and his teaching. I assumed post-test responses would highlight following as a vital part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. One participant noted the theme of Jesus as “the way, the truth, and the life.” I was hoping the biblical foundation of this project would have been part of more definitions to this question. Perhaps there needs to be more intention in sharing the biblical foundation as a theme for discipleship in future class sessions.

As the survey neared completion, the next question, 26, asked “What is the most important need in your church?” Pre-test answers appear to highlight the need for revival in the local church. Having more young families join the church and being active in the church was another common response in the pre-test survey. The post-test

responses appeared to focus on the need for small groups and spiritual formation. The post-test responses could indicate that the course material was able to inform participants of the importance of small groups for faith formation. Since the project was designed to create a system of small groups to help with faith formation at Greensboro First, the post-test responses appear to show an increased desire for such groups at the church.

Question 27, “describe your relationship with God at this moment,” was asked so participants could define their relationship with God in their own words. Pre and post-test responses seem to indicate that participants do have a personal relationship with God. Pre and post-test responses also seem to indicate that many of the participants have a desire to improve that relationship with God.

Question 28 was asked to determine how confident participants were discipling other Christians. It seems like the pre-test answers reflect some confusion about discipling and evangelism. Perhaps respondents thought the question was asking them how comfortable or confident they felt in sharing their faith with others. Instead, discipling is about nurturing people in their faith. Post-test responses seem to convey the same confusion. Post and pre-test responses do appear to indicate a desire in many of the participants to grow in this area. The course was designed to introduce participants into discipleship formation through small groups. If the class continued with more sessions, discipleship formation could have been covered in more detail.

The interdisciplinary foundation for the project was used to design the journal writing component of the course. Journal writing is one practice of cognitive behavior therapy. Participants were given a journal that they were encouraged to use during the

four-week class. For at least five days of the week, participants had an opportunity to answer the following questions that address spiritual practices:

Did you do the following today: Pray? Read Your Bible? Intentionally Share God's Grace with another person? How so?

Participants also had an opportunity to answer the following questions that would be used in the small group discussions during the class sessions:

How is it with your soul? What are your struggles and successes? How might God be working in your life?

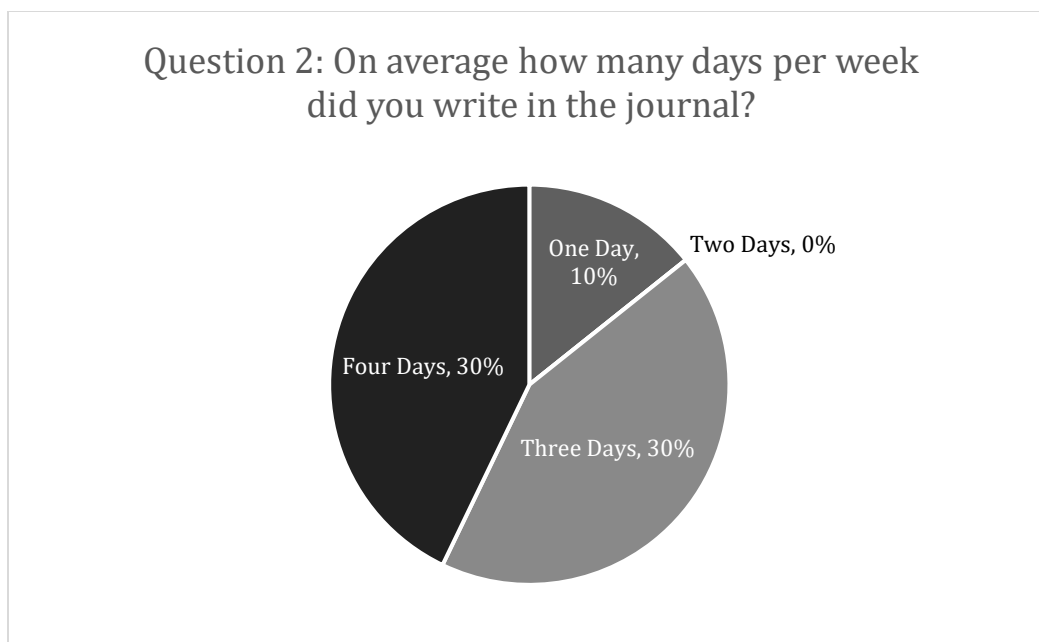
The principles from Truth Therapy were brought into the journal writing experience with weekly thematic Bible verses. Each week had a scripture verse or passage that connected with the focus and theme of the class sessions. Participants were given the following instructions:

Take time to read, reflect upon, and try to memorize each passage of scripture. The intent is to help us memorize the promises of God's word. Consider using the passage each week as a guide to help you write your responses to your journal. Week 1 John 14:6, Week 2 John 3:16-17, Week 3 Romans 8:16-17, and Week 4 Romans 12:1-2.

Again, the short span of the project did not provide enough time to analyze the journal writing experience quantitatively. If participants kept a journal for six months, a year, or longer, then quantitative analysis of their responses could provide insights into what affect journal writing has on spiritual transformation. The limited number of participants is also too small a sample to provide valid quantitative analysis. Because of short time span of project and small number of participant responses, analysis of responses will be qualitative.

Participants were asked to respond to questions about their experience writing in their journal during the class. Sixty percent of the class completed the journal writing

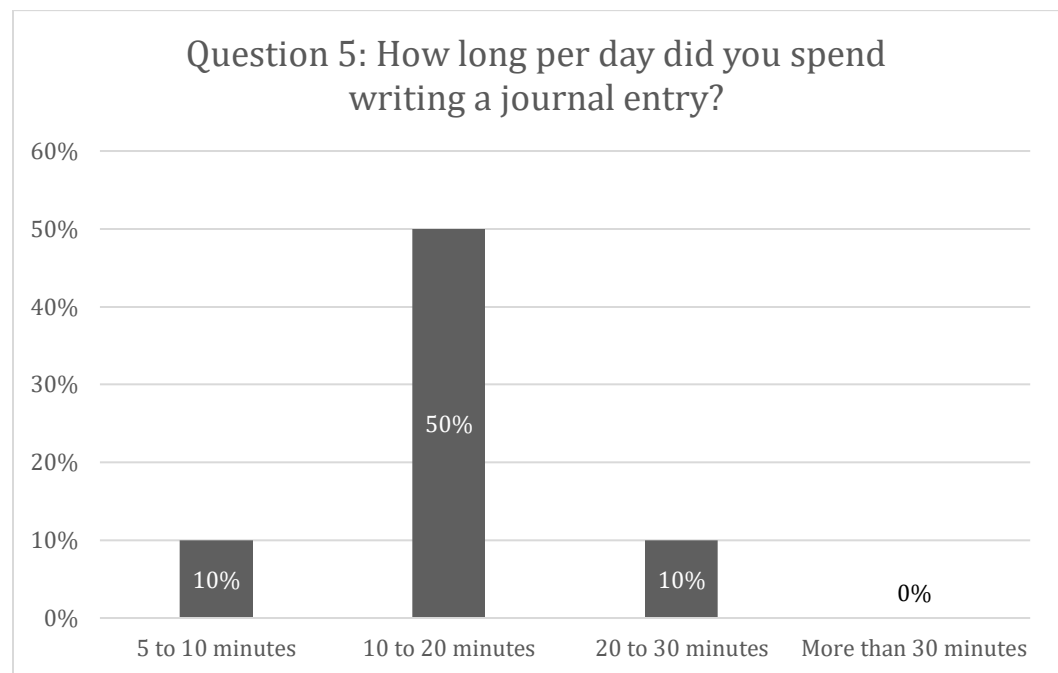
assignments for this course. Participants were given five days of journal assignments each week. The following chart shows the average number of days per week participants wrote in their journals.



Responses to questions 1 and 2 indicate that 60% of the class did complete the journal writing exercises. 90% of the class wrote in their journal more than three of the five days they were asked to write in their journal each week. This level of participation was more than I expected from the participants. I assumed most of the class would not keep a journal for the course.

The answers to questions 3 and 4 showed that about 60% had previously kept a journal, though none of them appeared to have a long standing, daily, or even weekly, practice. On the other hand, responses to question 5 show that 70% of the respondents spent five to thirty minutes each day writing a journal entry for this project. I anticipated

that most participants would spend about fifteen minutes writing a journal entry. Perhaps past journal writing practices positively influenced participants' willingness to write in a journal for this course. It appears that the majority of participants did spend an appropriate amount of time writing in their journals. Before the project, I was worried that most participants would spend less than five minutes writing a journal entry.



Question 7, “What insights did you gain from keeping a journal during this class?,” gave the participants an opportunity to share any insights they gained from using a journal during the class. Some of the responses were very encouraging. For example, “I would like to continue. It helped me consider the state of my soul regularly.”

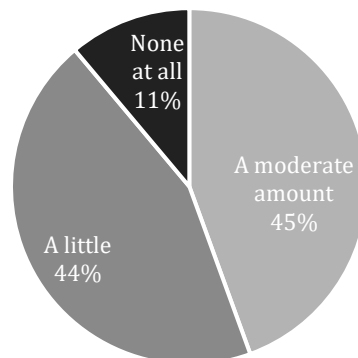
“It made me think more about what God does in my life daily - things I generally take for granted and should thank Him for.” This response could support the interdisciplinary foundation of this project for it shows how journaling helped the participant look inward.

“Made me realize I need to focus on how am doing with my soul. That what goes on in

your soul really matters and need to strive to grow daily.” I hope this participant will continue journal writing. It looks like responses to question 7 show that the journal writing exercises did help participants spend time critically evaluating their spiritual life.

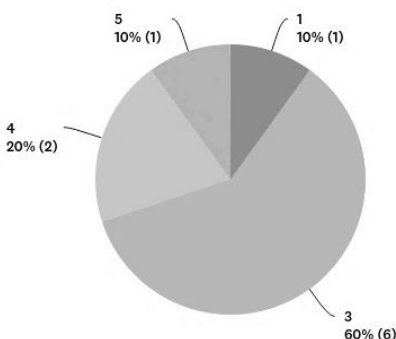
The journal questions were intended to help spur small group discussion. The basic idea was the journal prompts would help participants be ready to discuss the questions in their small group. Responses to question 10 appear to show a split among respondents as to whether journaling was a benefit in this way.

Question 10: Did journal writing help you share your spiritual experiences with your other classmates?



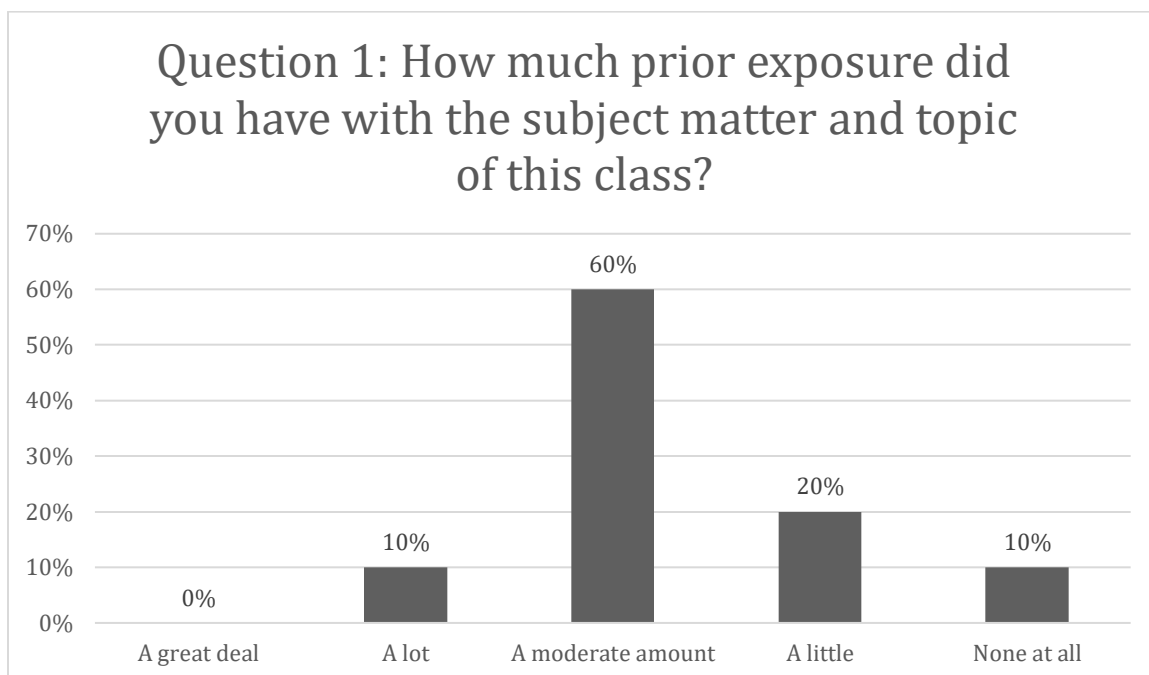
Perhaps, I should have been more direct in telling the small groups to discuss specific questions in the journal. Instead I gave open directions and said the journal prompts could be one of any topic you discuss together. Perhaps responses to this question are dependent on if the small groups actually used the journal prompts in their discussion or other topics.

Question 11 was, “How did journal writing impact your experience in the course?” The answers were on a 1 star (lowest) to 5 stars (highest) scale. The weighted average was 3.2 stars.



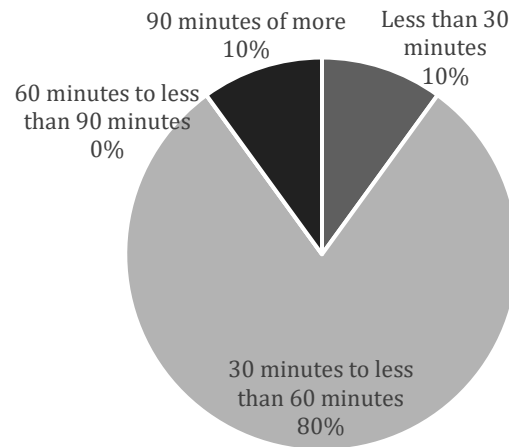
Responses to question 11 appear to show that the journal writing experience was overall helpful to participants. However, one person did not find the journal writing helpful at all, so their response brought down the average ranking. Nine of the responses were three stars or higher. Perhaps improving the journal prompts and provided examples of entries would increase this rating.

At the conclusion of the class, participants were asked to complete a course evaluation. This evaluation was used to get feedback on the course content and presentation. Relevant responses of ten participants who completed the evaluation are presented in this section. The first few evaluation questions were used to determine prior exposure and knowledge of the class’s subject matter that the participants had.



Responses to question 1 appear to indicate the majority of the class participants had some previous exposure to the material presented in the class. 30% of the participants had little or no familiarity with the material. One participant did share how they had spent one year in a previous church studying material similar to what was presented in this class. I assume this participant represents the 10% who had “a lot” of previous exposure to the course material. Another participant shared how they were new to Methodism and knew very little about John Wesley. I assume this participant represents the 10% who had no previous exposure to the course content. Most of the participants had been members in a United Methodist Church for several years, so it would be expected for them to have heard some of the course material in other context.

Question 2: Excluding time in class, about how much time did you spend working on outside study and preparation for this class each day?

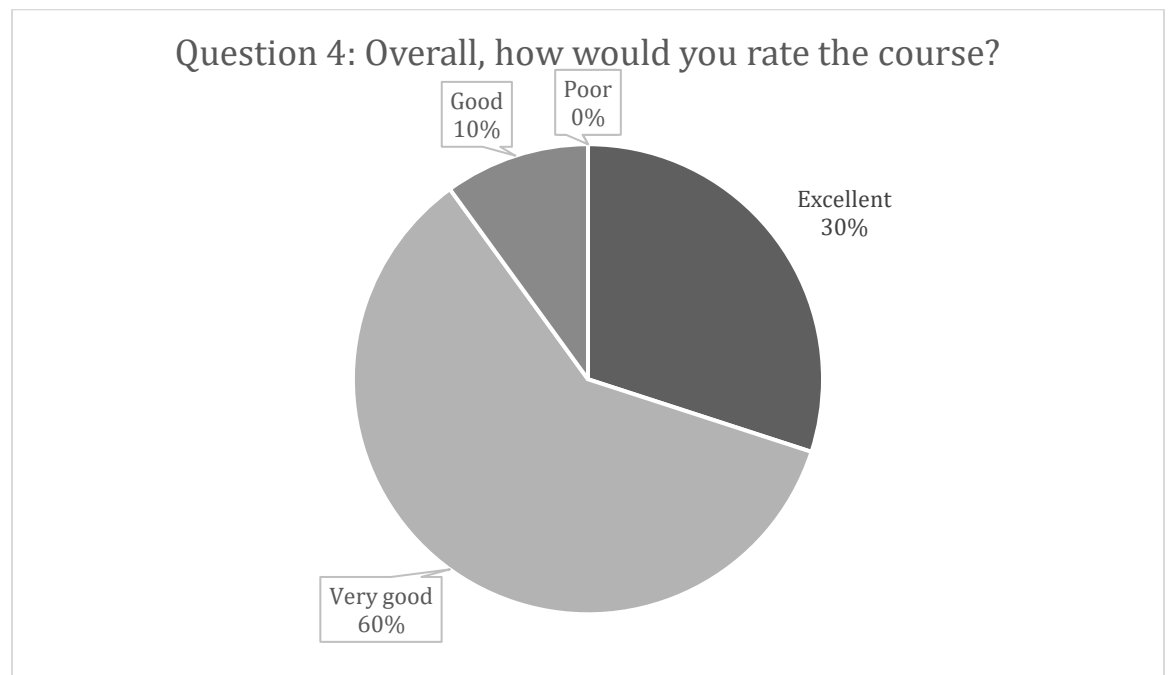


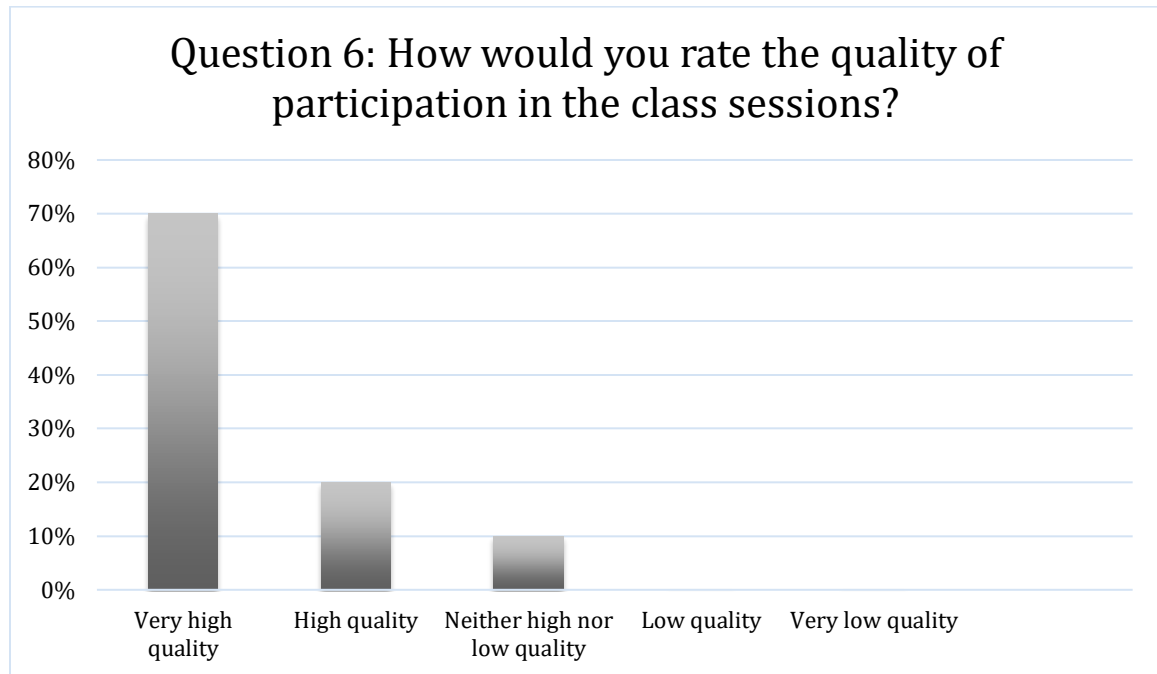
Question 2 appears to indicate that the majority of participants spent thirty minutes or more each day studying the course material. Preparation time also included journal writing. The project was designed for participants to spend about thirty minutes each day on course material. If reading assignments and study took more than sixty minutes to complete, I assumed most participants would not complete them. I wanted full participation so I think the homework assignments were designed with an appropriate amount of time needed to complete them.

Reponses to question 3 seem to indicate the 90% of the class was prepared for the class session. This is a good indicator that the course assignments were not too difficult. This is also a good indicator that the preparation work did not require a significant amount of time to complete. The preparation of students was also seen in the engagement of the students during the class sessions.

Question 4 asked participants to provide an overall rating for the course.

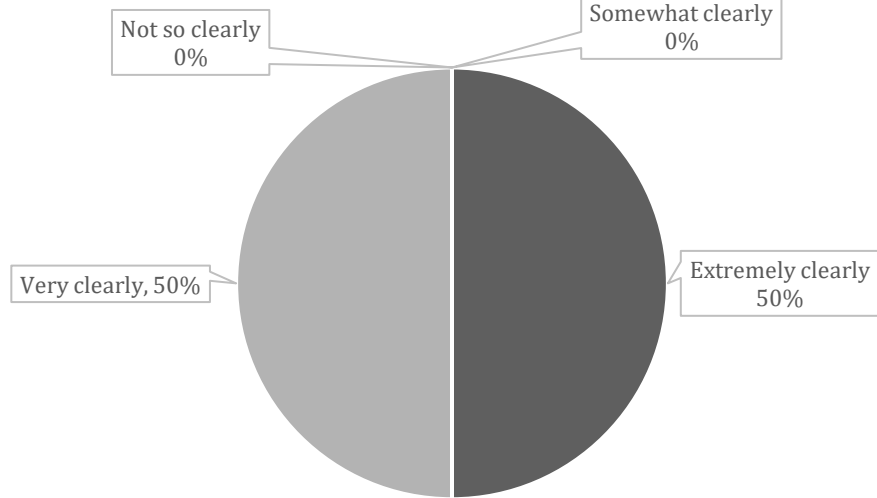
Responses to question 4 seem to indicate 90% of participants rated their course experience at least “very good.” These responses appear to show that overall the course was well designed and executed. In my opinion the scoring is a bit high. The other survey responses, such as Question 6, do appear to show consistency in rating of the course. However, I also am aware that participants wanted to help with the completion of this project, so their rating could be slightly inflated.



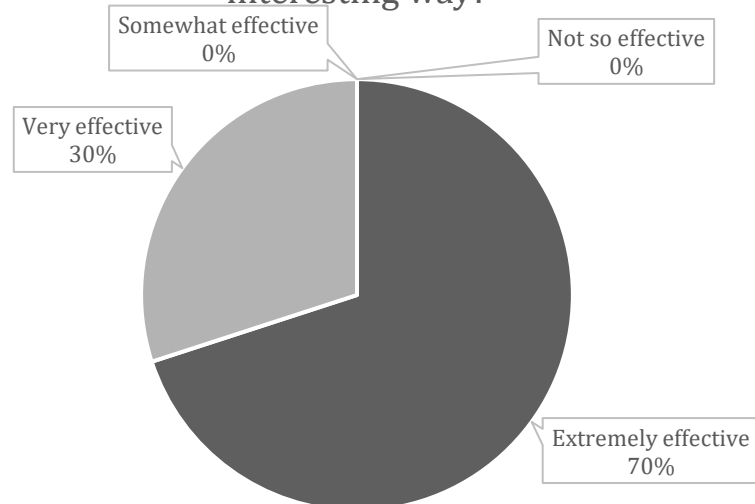


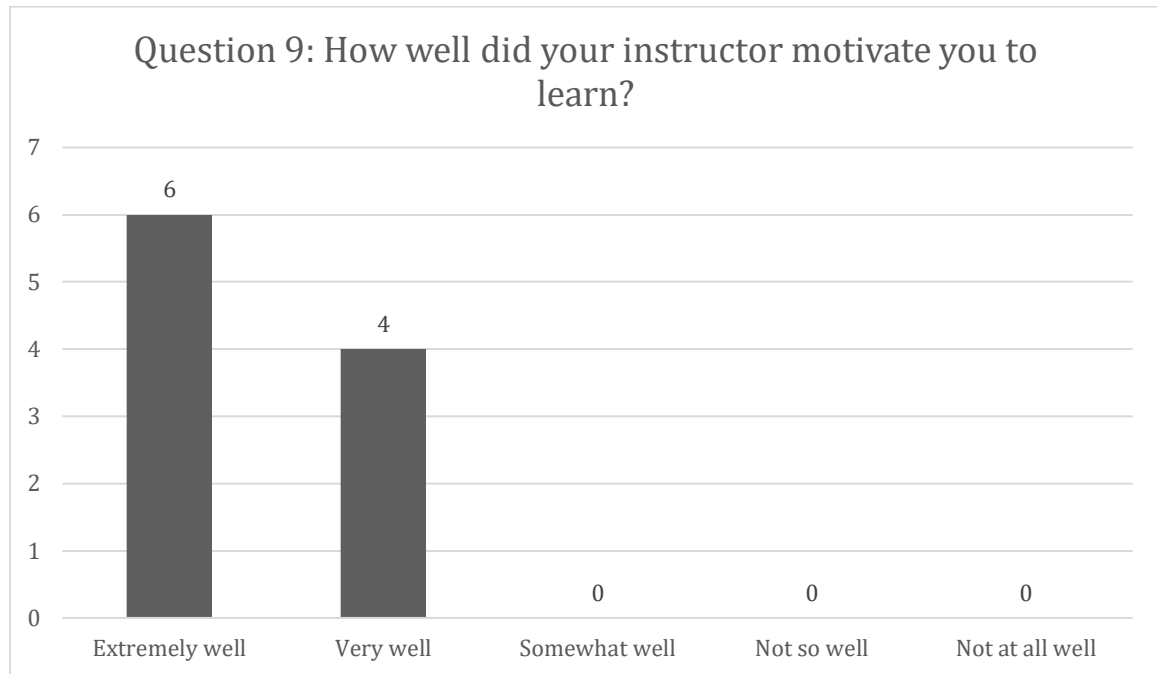
Responses to question 6 and 7 seem to reveal that the class was designed in such a way that participants were able to have appropriate and quality engagement in the class sessions. The video recording of the sessions also supports these responses. Recordings from sessions 2, 3, and 4 capture several of the classmates engaging with the instructor and talking with other participants.

Question 7: Did the instructor convey the class material clearly?



Question 8: Did the instructor teach the material in an interesting way?





Questions 7, 8, and 9 asked participants to evaluate the instructor. Responses to questions 7, 8, and 9 seem to show that the course instructor was able to effectively teach the course material. Responses to question 7 reveal that the instructor taught the material clearly. Responses to question 8 reveal that the instructor conveyed the material in a manner that participants found interesting. According to responses to question 9, it seems that clear and interesting teaching appear to have motivated the participants to learn.

I was the instructor for the majority of class sessions, so this evaluation was an evaluation of my teaching skills. I wrote the course content. If a different instructor presents this course in the future, these responses might be different. The difference in reviews could come from another instructor's ability to teach the course material. The difference in reviews could also come from another instructor's ability to understand the course material.

Question 11: What are the most important takeaways for you from the course?

Journaling is an excellent tool for spiritual growth. Our church would benefit from having more small group study and sharing.

The importance of grace in my life.

A better understanding of the history of The Methodist Church.

That Methodism was a movement based on basic biblical Christianity which led people to gather and be responsible toward each other. Christ's commandment for us.

Jesus is the way, truth and life. I need to follow him more.

Knowing that God is the way, the truth, and the life. This extremely profound for me.

A clearer understanding of who John Wesley was. A much clearer understanding of Methodism.

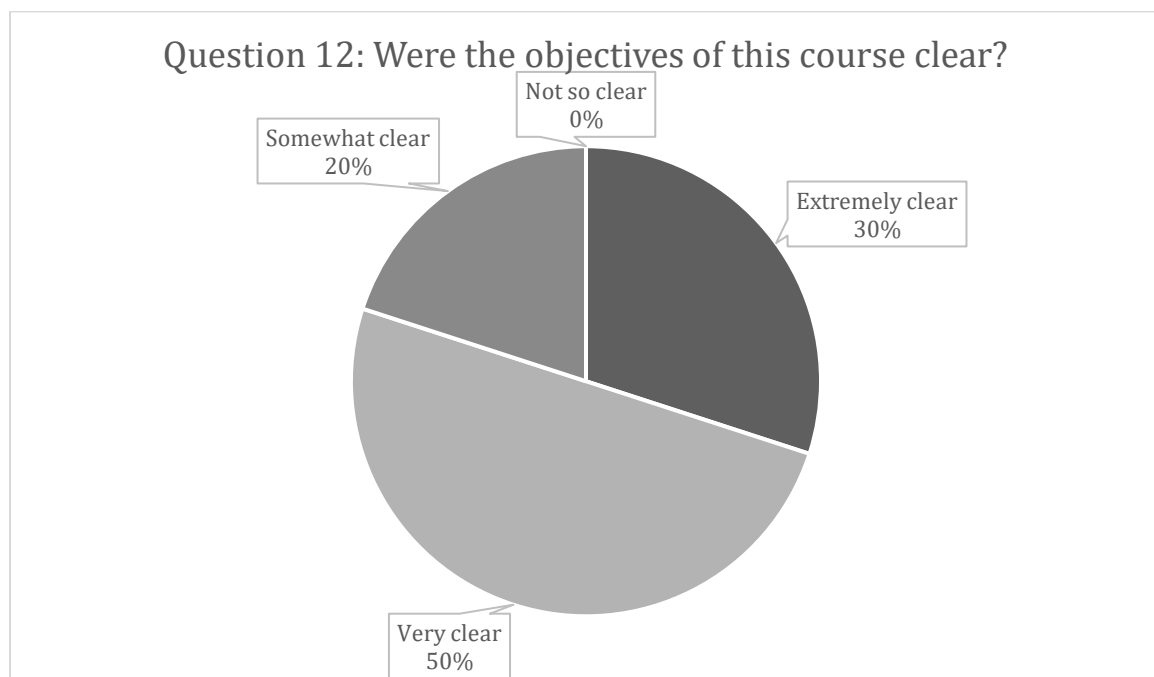
Wesley's doctrine. Found the instructor's summary of Wesley's life very interesting.

Motivation to try journaling again and more awareness of purposefully sharing God's love every day.

Question 11 asked participants to share the most important takeaway or information they learned from the course. Responses to question 11 are positive, for they seem to indicate the course material successfully conveyed the learning goals of this project. Two responses repeat the need for small groups in the local church and for faith formation. Four of the responses also show that participants gained a better understanding of Wesleyan and Methodist theology. Four of the responses also seem to indicate that participants were able to learn more of the history of John Wesley and the Methodist movement. These responses encourage me to further refine the course so it can be improved.

Question 12 asked participants about the clarity of the course's objectives.

Responses to question 12 appear to indicate that the objectives of this course were clearly communicated to the participants. The main objective of this course was to have participants evaluate their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The secondary objective of this course was to introduce participants to small groups in a Wesleyan context. The third objective was to teach basic Methodist history, theology, and doctrine. Responses to the opened ended questions 15, 16, 17, and 18 appear to support the responses to question 12.



Question 15: What were the major strengths of this course?

Journaling, encouragement from learning about the Wesleyan methods, enjoying being with Hugh and other church friends.

Taught us to think about our spiritual journey rather than just the current events in our lives.

The interaction of the class participants.
Pastor Hugh's teaching ability and writing my spiritual journey.

A good refresher on Methodist and John Wesley.

The history of the founder, John Wesley, his goal and beliefs. The sharing of my spiritual journey and realizing others experienced similar events.

Clear factual information drawing me closer to God. Influenced me more to be a strong Christian.

Non-threatening, but made you evaluate and think about your spiritual life. Enjoyed sharing in the small groups. Had never done a spiritual autobiography before.

Material new to me about the "Wesleyan" way, not just Methodist denomination. Motivation for more quiet time.

Responses to question 15 seem to indicate that the participants were able to meet the intended objectives of the course. Participants indicated that the course helped them evaluate their spiritual journey. Participants also indicated that the course helped them better understand the history, theology, and doctrine of the Methodist and Wesleyan movement. Again, these were part of the objectives of this course.

Questions 16 and 17 asked participants to reveal areas of weakness and improvement for the course. These selected responses to question 16 appear to indicate a need to improve and modify the journal writing component of the course. Responses also seem to suggest that participants want more time to meet as a class. The class could have more sessions or longer class sessions. I agree with the need for more class time and sessions. Spiritual formation takes time.

Question 16: What were the major weaknesses of this course?

More time to meet.

Not sure if more breakout sessions would be better. Not really a weakness of the course. Just a thought.

I would consider my lack of understanding of living as a Methodist.

I think the formal classroom time could have been longer. I am a slow learner
Need more classes or longer classes.

Responses to question 17 appear to be solutions to weaknesses mentioned in responses to question 16. It appears that participants desire more time to meet as a class. This could be longer class sessions or more class sessions. It also seems that there needs to be clarification about the leadership component of this course. I think one or two participants thought this course would train participants to lead small groups. Leading small groups was not a primary objective of this course. This area of confusion needs to be clarified in future class sessions. However, if there were more class sessions, leadership training for class and band meetings could be added to the course objectives.

Question 17: What one change would you make that would most improve this course?

I really thought the course was excellent. I struggled with interpreting some of the questions on the journaling assignment. Maybe having some examples of typical answers would give me more direction.

Specify the “leadership” activities needed to start and maintain a small group experience in our church.

More class meetings.

We probably needed one more week to fully focus on material and wrap up. See above (Not sure if more breakout sessions would be better. Not really a weakness of the course. Just a thought.)

The course needed to be more days because I would have loved to discuss more.

May have a few more classroom sessions.

More class time.

Question 18, the final evaluation question, asked participants “Why did you take this course?” Responses to question 18 indicate that most students elected to participate in this course because of the instructor. I believe this is an important factor to consider in the overall evaluation of responses. It is possible that the desire to help the instructor complete the assignment for the degree could have influenced the responses to the survey questions. However, it is important to note that participants also indicated a desire to learn more about the Methodist church. These responses did not surprise me, for many of the participants have been supportive of my work on this project. I was expecting them to be helpful when it came time to teach the class sessions of my project.

Question 18: Why did you take this course?

Support for Hugh and interest in spiritual formation.

I wanted to learn more about Wesley and my church heritage and also help out a friend.

Keyboard did not come up for strength and weakness so I will say here that knowledge of instructor was a strength and the journal expectations a weakness.

To grow in knowledge and understanding of my spiritual journey.

To learn about The Methodist Church.

Any time I can learn more of Christian study, Methodism in particular, and my own journey I will try to attend. Plus, Pastor Hugh was teaching.

Love the instructor and always learn from being with him and helping his if I can.

As a new Methodist, I want to understand fully the concepts and ways of this faith.

To help Pastor Hugh of course. But, also to hear Pastor Hugh and gain some of his knowledge and understanding of our Methodist movement.

To aid instructor in getting degree.

Interest in spiritual formation and support for Hugh.

As an additional tool for evaluation, I video recorded the four class sessions. The video recording was very helpful in documenting what actually happened in each class session. However, the size of the room, placement of the camera, and location of participants in the room limited what could be recorded. Most of the videos capture images of only two or three students and the instructor. The video does record the audio of each session. Initially evaluation of the video was to analyze body language of class participants, but the quality of the recording limits visual analysis.

Watching the recordings of the class sessions with a focus on listening to the audio, does reveal some possible changes in classroom dynamics. In the video of the class session, the instructor does most of the talking. In sessions two, three and four, the instructor continues to do a majority of the talking, but participants to talk more. There appears to be a marked difference in the amount of participant talking in session four when compared to session one. In my opinion, the video recording of this project is more helpful as a tool to document what took place in class sessions. With better recording and in-depth analysis of each video, the recordings could provide more insight into the apparent change in classroom experience and dynamics during the project.

Conclusion

Reviewing the responses to the evaluation tools indicates that this project was successful in educating participants about the importance of discipleship formation through small groups in the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition. The hypothesis of this project was that participation in this leadership class would create interest in forming a

systematic discipleship program at Greensboro First United Methodist Church.

Participants' experiences in this course were overall positive. Participants shared how this course was helpful in their personal spiritual formation as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Review of the evaluation tools also indicate parts of the project that need improvement. First, the project needs more time to meet. More time could be added to the class with additional sessions or longer sessions. I think it would be better to have more sessions instead of longer class sessions. Additional class sessions could provide participants the opportunity to discuss course content. Additional sessions could also provide the opportunity to include teaching on leading class and band meetings. Teaching on practical leadership of the class or band was not part of this course, but some participants indicated that this material would be helpful.

Second, the evaluation of the project seems to indicate that the journal writing component of the course needs improvement. Several participants stated that examples of journal entries would have helped them write their own entries. For some participants, the journal prompts were confusing. More class time would provide an opportunity for teaching about and explaining the journal questions. The journal prompts are also the traditional questions that were asked in the class and band meetings of the early Methodist societies. Teaching about the class and band meetings would also help clarify these questions and their role in the small group.

Lastly, the most difficult challenge of this project was the unexpected change of appointment that I had in June 2019. Moving from Greensboro First United Methodist Church removed me from the role of their associate pastor. Ideally, this project would have been completed while I was still serving this church. Moving to a new pastoral

appointment brought unanticipated changes to the course. The number of sessions was limited. Practical reasons limited me from offering different times for class sessions. If I had been serving the church, it would have been easier to have a morning and an afternoon class session. This would have likely increased the number of participants. Also, no longer being appointed to the context limits the application of the project after its completion.

Fortunately, I am under appointment in a new context as the senior pastor of Lavonia First United Methodist Church. As the senior pastor, I have the ability to plan the discipleship formation programs of the congregation. As an associate pastor, I needed to work with the plans and vision of the senior pastor. I will be teaching this course at my new context as a way to establish a discipleship formation program for adults at Lavonia First United Methodist Church. In my new context I will have an opportunity to see if the principles and foundations of this project translate into my new congregation. If so, this would be supportive of sharing this project with other congregations and leaders.

Christians, particularly those in the United Methodist Church, continue to need covenant communities that help them become better disciples of Jesus Christ. They also continue to need help becoming disciple makers. I believe focusing on Jesus Christ as the way, truth, and life while watching over each other in love and grace in covenant community continues to be both the need and future hope of the church.

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